Suzy Gershman's

BORN TO SHOP

FRANCE

The Ultimate Guide for Travelers Who Love to Shop

4th Edition

Wiley Publishing, Inc.

VISIT…

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For KVF, who gave me Provence and taught me how to use it: with love and thanks.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzy Gershman is a journalist, an author, and a self-confessed shopping goddess who has worked in the fashion and fiber industry for more than 25 years. The *Born to Shop* series celebrated its 20th year in 2004 and has been translated into eight languages, making Gershman an international expert on retail and trade. Her essays on retailing have been used by the Harvard School of Business; her reportage on travel and retail has appeared in *Travel + Leisure, Travel Holiday, Travel Weekly,* and most of the major women's magazines. Gershman currently writes for *Air France Madame.* When she's not in an airport, she can be found in Paris, Provence, or Texas.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of prices appearing in this book, please keep in mind that prices can change. In this edition, prices are quoted in U.S. dollars ($) or euros (€). Dollar estimates have been made at the exchange rate of 1€ = $1.15.

TO START WITH

While Paris may have been the co-star in the final episodes of *Sex and the City,* it is France that's the real star of this edition—making it clear that on the one hand there's Paris, and on the other, France. The two are very, very different.

This edition will be most helpful for those who plan to drive around the French countryside. With the TGV fast train and the fact that I now own a house in Provence, I have loaded down these pages with notes from research trips, with a heavy slant toward Provence and the rest of the south of France.

If you're going to just be in Paris or if you think you will confine your serious shopping to Paris, you'll find that *Born to Shop Paris* is more for you. The Paris chapter in this book is for people who will be in and out in a day or two and who have already had the opportunity—or will soon have the opportunity—to shop in the countryside.

Thanks go to everyone who has helped me learn about France and feel comfortable here, especially Karen Fawcett of Bonjour Paris (www.bonjourparis.com); her husband, Victor Kramer; all my hotelier friends who have whispered tips and updates in my ears; and all the friends who have sent me magazine articles and so forth.

Special thanks go to Alexander Lobrano, who first took me to Marseille and showed me its hidden wonders. Alec and I are eating our way through all the new and rotated chefs in the south of France as you read this; I'm the fat one. The tourist boards in many cities went out of their way to understand my bad accent and to point me toward the best in town; particular thanks to Nathalie Steinberg in Marseille.

Chapter One

THE BEST OF FRANCE AT A GLANCE

CREME DE LA CREME

Paris is a special place unto itself. Far more than just the City of Light, it has many wonderful and beautiful things to see, to eat, and to buy—but it is not France. In many ways, it is the opposite of the rest of France.

You will find passion and fashion and style by the mile in Paris, but you will not find the soul of France. Therefore, I have devised this quickie overview chapter to give you a fast look at what I consider to be some of the best bets in the French countryside. Nearly everything listed below is outside Paris; for specifics on the best of the City of Light, see chapter 4.

Obviously, I haven't been to every village in France, and this book does not cover the entire country. What you have here are some highlights that might help you flash forward to the best addresses if you are in a mad rush. *Vite, vite!*

Who knows, you could be between screenings at the Cannes Film Festival. Or you could be between couverts. Straighten your black tie, fluff up your bosom, put on your Ray-Bans, and get out your highlighter pen.

Best Overall Makeup & Perfume Shop

SEPHORA
Stores in Paris and the provinces.

There are Sephora stores all over France, and each varies, depending on the real estate. The flagship on the avenue des Champs-Elysées is probably the best one, but there are good branches in most major cities.

Many Sephora stores are on two levels and come complete with a kiddie play area. Merchandise is organized by color in the front of the store and by brand around the sides of the store, with fragrance in a different area. Fragrance is alphabetized, and no one line has more space or adverts over any other line: It's very democratic. There are tons of testers and paper strips, so you can spritz until you cease to breathe.

The house line of bath products not only is fabulous, but also comes in miniature sizes that are perfect for travel or gift-giving. Sephora provides an electronic *détaxe* (VAT refund) at the cash register if you qualify (see "Détaxe," in chapter 2).

Best Overall *Parapharmacie*

PARASHOP
Stores in Paris and most French cities.

A *parapharmacie* like Parashop specializes in beauty and pharmaceutical brands, often from the same companies that make designer products. While best for *les soins* (treatments), it sometimes has color cosmetics as well. You'll also find bath products, soaps, health and beauty aids, and more.

Best Monday in France: Cannes & Nice

This is a double-header for true flea-market devotees: You can do the half-hour between the two cities on a train. Monday flea markets are held year-round, so there's none of this closed-on-Monday business.

Although the Cannes Monday *brocante* market (Marché Forville) isn't very big or splendid, it is very nice and funky,

and prices are good. Combine it with the 250-odd dealers at the cours Saleya in Nice, and you'll have yourself a fine day.

Best Tuesday in France: Vaison-la-Romaine

Vaison-la-Romaine is a small city in northern Vaucluse, in Provence. The market rambles all over the city and will bring you much joy.

Best Fruit & Flower Market

Cours Saleya
Nice.

Any day of the week except Monday, the cours Saleya in Nice is awash with striped awnings and tables heaving with locally grown fresh produce. You can buy flowers, candies, olives, honey, and more.

Best Factory Store

Porthault
19 rue Robespierre, Rieux-en-Cambrésis (near Lille).

The Porthault factory sells goodies at a fraction of their retail price. It's very hit or miss, and you must pay in cash; but this is not only worth the drive—it's worth a trip to France.

Best Factory-Outlet Mall

La Vallee Village
Marne la Vallée, outside Paris.

Though more and more outlet malls open all over Europe, this one, 40 minutes outside Paris and just 5 minutes from Disneyland Paris, is the best because it offers more upscale brands than the others. That it's adorable and clean and next to a regular mall and has an outdoor nursery makes it even better. The only bad news: no dogs. La Vallée's outlets are open on Sundays, although note that the adjacent Auchan store and shops in the mall are not. For more info, call ✆ **01-60-42-35-00** or

go to www.lavalleevillage.com. You can arrive by RER or take the Cityrama shuttle bus from Paris every Tuesday, Thursday, or Sunday (✆ **01-44-55-60-00** for reservations).

Best Annual Sale Event

LES OLIVADES
Chemin des Indienneurs, St-Etienne-du-Grès.

I get all sweaty just thinking about this one—a factory sale that's in an actual factory, with products set in a jumble on tables or falling out of open cartons, and yard goods sold right off the bolt. There's clothes, there's home style, there's fabrics. There's delightful chaos at rock-bottom prices. See p. 220 for more.

Best Secret Sales

CATHERINE MAX
17 av. Raymond Poincaré, Paris.

Catherine Max has a most un-French concept and is doing business like gangbusters: Her private club allows members entrance to either or both of her Paris showrooms, where she hosts a rotating array of big-brand sample sales. Normal admission is by invitation and for members only; readers of *Born to Shop* may gain one-time entrance without membership by showing a copy of this book at the door. Go to www.espacecatherinemax.fr to find the dates and brands that correspond with your visit to Paris.

Best Way to Look French (for Men)

VILEBREQUIN
Stores in Paris and major French cities.

This men's bathing-suit line (which also makes boxer shorts) is de rigueur beachwear, especially in the South of France. There are free-standing shops in Cannes, Monte Carlo, and St-Trop. The suits have a very identifiable style of print—much better than a logo.

Best Way to Look French (for Women)

Wear high heels without stockings, be tan, and buy everything a size too small. Cleavage is good.

Best Nautical Looks

Coco Chanel and Pablo Picasso made the striped French fisherman's T-shirt an icon of fashion. Today there are several firms, with distribution in both department stores and free-standing shops, that have reeled in most of the market due to their quality: **St-James** and **Amour-Lux.** These little babies are not cheap (about 45€/$52), but last forever, even after many washings. You will also see copycats out there, as stripes are always in style.

Best Soap

SAVONNERIE MARIUS FABRE
148 av. Paul Bourret, Salon-de-Provence.

My friend Alain Ducasse turned me on to this brand; it's a small firm that's been in business since 1900. You don't have to go to Salon-de-Provence to buy it; there is distribution in most Provençal-style shops, especially in the area between Nice and Cannes. You can also find it elsewhere in France, but you have to be looking hard.

Best Multiple

L'OCCITANE
Stores throughout France—and now the rest of the world.

L'Occitane (www.loccitane.com) now has shops everywhere—not just in France. It carries an enormous line of soaps, bath products, beauty products, and household scents such as candles, incense, and room sprays. I like the little tins of soap. The shea butter is good for very dry hands, and the orange-cinnamon home-ambience oil is delightful. This is a great place for doing all your gift shopping in one swoop.

Runner-Up

Oliviers & Co.
Stores throughout France.

This is the latest creation of the marketing genius Olivier Baussan, who also created L'Occitane. The first stores were named O&Co., and you still sometimes see signs written that way. They specialize in Mediterranean olive products—essentially olive oils and olive-based foodstuffs, but also things made of olive wood, chocolates shaped like olives, books, and so on. A few of the stores have food bars as well.

Best Cookies

Mere Poullard
Mont St-Michel and most French supermarkets.

These simple butter cookies from Mère Poullard will slay you. They are nationally distributed throughout grocery stores in France; I buy mine in Paris at any grocery store.

Runner-Up

Tuiles Citron
Most French supermarkets.

Lu, the largest maker of cookies and biscuits in France, now has a Taillefine line of low-cal cookies. Its *Tuiles Citron* (lemon wafers) are to die for . . . and to diet for.

Best Chocolate

Joel Durand
3 bd. Victor Hugo, St-Rémy; 46 rue Victor Hugo, St-Paul-de-Vence.

I'm not sure if I've fallen for the gimmick, the beauty of the man, or the taste of the chocolates, but who cares? This young chocolatier has me hooked. He makes 26 flavors of chocolate, each

named for a letter of the alphabet. You use a chart to figure out what's inside. I am addicted to L—chocolate and lavender.

Runner-Up

Bernachon
42 cours Franklin Roosevelt, Lyon.

Okay, so it's no surprise that Bernachon would end up on my list—he's on everyone else's list, too. For chocolate candy, Joël (see above) gets my vote, but when I'm thinking of a rich, creamy chocolate éclair, then it must be from Bernachon.

Best Confiture Shop

Maison de la Confiture
Gassin (outside St-Tropez).

Note that I didn't say Maison de la Confiture has the best confiture in France—that would be too hard to pick—but it does have the best shop. Maison de la Confiture has many wild, weird, and wonderful flavors and combinations, and all the jam jars are topped with little squares of Provençal fabric. My fave is the blood-orange confiture. The store also sells some antiques and gift items. ***Note:*** No credit cards.

Best Cooking Classes

Ecole Ritz Escoffier
15 place Vendôme, Paris.

Learn how to ritz a dish. Classes are offered in both English and French. For info, call ✆ **800/996-5758** from the U.S. Local phone ✆ 01-43-16-30-50. www.ritzparis.com.

La Varenne
Château du Feÿ, Villecien.

La Varenne is the most famous—they've been doing it to rave reviews for the longest time. Call ✆ **800/537-6486** from the U.S. Local phone ✆ **03-86-63-18-34.** www.lavarenne.com.

LE JARDIN DES SENS ATELIER DE CUISINE
36 bis av. St-Lazare, Montpellier.

The most famous twins in France. Call ✆ **04-99-58-38-38** or go to www.jardin-des-sens.com.

Best Ever

Just to make sure you remember you're in France now, I'd like to inform you that this is the country that teams a nutritionist and a three-star Michelin chef to plan the menus in its prison system.

BEST BETS FOR GIFTS

You're Going to Buy Only One Thing in France

- A house in Burgundy.
- An Hermès tie or scarf (check out the newest model, a tribute to Salvador Dalí).
- A bottle of scent not yet introduced in the U.S.

You Only Have Time for One-Stop Shopping

Try any branch of Monoprix or a *hypermarché,* the French version of a modern dry-goods store.

Best Kitsch Outside Paris

This wasn't meant to be funny, and not everyone thinks it is (kitsch has that problem), but personally, I think this is just the best little giggle in France: You can buy Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc) coffee in Rouen, the city where Joan was burned at the stake. It's French roast.

Best Gifts Under $5

- Latest edition of a French magazine, preferably *Elle,* which costs about 2.60€ ($3).

- *Calissons* (candy-covered almonds), sold everywhere in Provence for about 4.35€ ($5) a box.
- Savon de Marseille, about 4.35€ ($5) for a 400g block (the bigger-size square soap).
- A *gant de toilette,* the French version of a washcloth (like a terry-cloth mitt), which can be teamed with soap if you're a big spender.
- Something from the grocery store (see below).

Best Gifts from the Supermarket

- Coffee—my friend Ken swears by **Carte Noire** brand, found at any supermarket for around 2.60€ ($3). Pay attention to the packaging, as this comes in ground or whole-bean form, freeze-dried, instant, and so on.
- Cookies, such as the two types listed earlier in this chapter, the Belgian cinnamon cookies called Speculoos, or the Petit Sables Normands brand of orange-flavored butter cookies are all wonderful choices.
- *Confiture* (jam), especially if you can find unusual flavors such as rose.
- Tea—the British may be famous for theirs, but there are several French flavors that you rarely find outside of France. Try Red Fruits *(les fruits rouges),* a blend sold by various brands. I think the Monoprix house brand's is the best.

Best Serious Gifts

- A bottle of wine from a meaningful vintage year (for example, when a child was born or when you were married—you get the idea). Conversely, choose a wine that will be at its peak on a special date (a 21st birthday, a 50th birthday, and so on). Remember, non-vintage Champagne cannot keep more than 3 years.
- A selection of beauty products from **Caudalie,** which are available in the U.S. but are easier to find in France. Made from grape seed and straight from a vineyard in Bordeaux,

these products can be gathered together and given in a basket—you can even add a small bottle of wine.

- Jewelry from one of the famous French crystal houses such as **Baccarat** or **Lalique.** It's less expensive in France, with greater savings if you qualify for *détaxe*. I like the new slide bracelet from Lalique (you buy the crystal charm and the bracelet separately)—drop-dead chic at a fair price (about 175€/$200).
- A candle with an exotic scent, such as one from **Mariage Frères** in Paris, about 43€ ($50). There are less expensive candles at other shops; department stores have a large selection, as does Sephora. I'm big on **Diptyque,** a brand with almost cult status in the U.S.—about 26€ ($30) per candle at Printemps in Paris or the Diptyque shop on the Left Bank.
- A **Longchamp** folding shopping bag or weekend tote; prices range with size and style. These are sold all over the world and are not unique, but they are so French and so important to *le look* that they make a great gift.
- A white blouse from **Anne Fontaine,** a chain found in every major city in France and several in the U.S. . . . the point is that nothing is more French than a fabulous white blouse. Prices begin around 65€ ($75).

Best Gifts for Kids

- Monoprix has a small toy selection, but it is well stocked with Legos and often has models that are not available in the United States.
- Little girls (and big girls, too) love perfume miniatures and samples, as well as makeup and small-size toiletries. Hoard the ones you get free, buy miniatures if they are well priced (some are collectors' items and cost a fortune, so watch out), and stop by Sephora for its adorable bath and fragrance collection in tiny sizes.
- Books in French, especially storybooks that you already have in English, make wonderful gifts for children. All Disney stories are available in French. Do not buy videocassettes,

as they are in Secam format, not NTSC, and will not be compatible with your VCR.

- Build-it-yourself paper cutouts of French landmarks can provide hours of entertainment.
- Try to find a souvenir with the child's name on it in French. If you can't get an exact match, find a similar name and give the child a French pet name. You can even pick a saint to go with it and then celebrate the saint's name day with the child.

Chapter Two

FRENCH DETAILS

BIENVENUE

Although the shopping in Paris may be quicker and easier than in any other city in the country, you don't really get an accurate picture of France if you stick to the City of Light. You can be in Paris and not really be in France. And you don't get the real shopping treats you deserve.

So get out of town, even if only for a day or a weekend. If you're looking for a price break, you'll want to go to some of the out-of-the-way places and even to a few factories—things are cheaper outside Paris. *C'est vrai!*

But no matter how the dollar dances, this is also where you'll create memories so priceless that money no longer matters. Once out of Paris, you can experience charming old towns, geraniums in window boxes, luxury hotels, perfume buys and beauty programs, Provençal fabrics, heaps of raspberries nestled into little handmade *paniers* (baskets), and people who are willing to listen to your attempts to speak French. Welcome to a country that will fill your senses with wonder and wash your soul in passion.

So *bienvenue,* my friends. Grab hold of your map and hit the road, Jacques. France and all its bounty await. And no, the French don't hate Americans, they don't forget who died on D-Day (or why), and yes, *mais oui,* they really want you to visit. Just don't mention the war.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

If you want to have plenty of money for shopping, you have a fair amount of homework to do before you set foot in France. The bargains are not just lying around; you're going to have to work for them. The cost of living in France is high, so you have to live French-style in order to save. Also remember, there are deals for tourists and deals for locals, and you need to know when you should be which.

The French Government Tourist Office (www.francetourism.com), which has offices in various U.S. cities, offers some super materials, and I have been knocked out by the brochures, maps, and paperwork sent to me by local tourist offices throughout France. All are available in English. Don't be shy about writing or faxing directly to France and to each *département* for information.

Print Information, Please

Club France is a service offered by the French Government Tourist Office. A single membership costs about $95; call ✆ **800/881-5060,** ext. 27, for information or to join. Membership entitles you to a discount card and a bulletin filled with tips and coupons for complimentary drinks and other goodies.

France Today is a great newspaper published in the United States in English. I'm not sure which I enjoy more—the editorial content or the ads, which often have specific travel and trip info. There's also a classified section you can use if you want to rent a house or get personal in French. A 1-year subscription is about $40 in the U.S., $50 outside the U.S. Call ✆ **800/999-9718** for more information.

FUSAC is a local freebie handed out in Paris but hard to find elsewhere. It's mostly ads—great for finding long- or short-term rentals, swaps, cars, and services. You can get a subscription in the U.S. or have a friend in Paris mail it to you. Check out www.fusac.fr for info; there are 6-month subscriptions available if you are just using it to help prepare for a trip.

Electronically Yours

Hotels, airlines, and travel agents all have their own websites, often offering glimpses of properties, special deals, or more. Many stores have websites as well. Each issue of *France Today* has a column called "Web Watch," which highlights some of the best websites on France. One site I like is Bonjour Paris (www.bonjourparis.com), which actually covers more than just Paris.

Also remember to look up generic U.S. travel sites and bulletin boards that have information on many places, including France.

As you know, websites come and go at a rapid pace, but here are a few you might want to check out (note that any site that ends with "fr" is most likely to be in French):

www.bonjourparis.com (best overall English-language site on France)

www.culture.fr (wisdom from the French Culture Ministry)

www.champselysees.org (updates on news from the 'hood)

www.hotelweb.fr (hotel-booking site for French firms like Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure, and Ibis)

www.info-france-usa.org (French Embassy in the U.S.)

www.meteo.fr (French weather reports)

Seasonally Yours

The biggest secret to eating, sleeping, and shopping in France is simply seasonal. The prices on most items change with the climate; if the dollar ratio has you down, think off season.

Most destinations have two seasons: in and out. Summer is traditionally thought of as "in season." Everyone who travels knows that winter is "out" and thus always cheaper than summer. However, France does not play by the same rules.

In France there are four seasons, and almost all hotels have four different price categories for the same room: high, very high, low, and shoulder.

In Cannes, there is an extra season, called festival, which means there are five seasons on the Riviera. During festival, which covers the Film Festival in May and all large conventions, rooms are actually scalped and prices are raised sky-high. Summer's high season is a respite compared to festival prices.

As much as I don't like to talk about it, I must also point out that there is what I call tragedy season. This happens when some weird act of God or other terrible thing (for example, a bombing, a hijacking, a strike, or a hoof-and-mouth disease outbreak) occurs, and people refrain from traveling, thus pressuring hotels and restaurants to drop their prices. Tragedy seasons can be terrible things—but the chance of anything happening to you is usually small, and the bargains to be had are usually large.

Besides the fluctuation in hotel rates, menu prices also change with the season. Similarly, if prices in stores aren't raised outright during peak seasons, at the least your bargaining position with the proprietor varies according to the flow of tourists.

Please note that by *tourists* I don't just mean just Americans. During the French school holidays, when families travel to resorts, the prices are raised for French tourists as well. It's good to know when French school holidays fall, as they will affect your freedom to travel and find deals. The French Government Tourist Office prints a free wallet-size card that lists all school vacations; any French calendar will also list school breaks by zone.

Note: Seasons in resort towns vary by region. When it's in season in Cannes, it may still be out of season in Deauville. When rooms are top dollar in Cannes, with surcharges up the wazoo, prices are dirt-cheap in Paris, where they'll throw in everything but the hotel's Porthault bathrobe.

Big cities traditionally have low room rates in July and August, and on weekends throughout the year. Also note that the French celebrate many holidays (try getting any work done in the month of May). During these times, hotel rooms in big cities go begging, while resorts are sold out. Plan your travel accordingly.

The British Are Coming

Along with the American tourists and the French, you must also take into account the local British population and how it affects prices and transportation. In specific parts of France (mostly Normandy and the southwest), the British population is so strong that specialty stores selling English foodstuffs have popped up, and real-estate brokers say their clientele is 90% Brit. Real-estate prices have gone so high in some areas that only Brits can afford to buy. French is now a second language.

These communities seem to pop up near transportation centers—especially low-cost airline hubs or train routes that are near ferries or Eurostar. If you travel to Europe through London, you may be able to take advantage of some of these affordable fares to reduce the cost of getting to France.

GETTING THERE

From the United States

Here are a few of the tricks I've discovered:

- Get on the e-mail subscriber lists for all airlines and have them send you their special fares. You'd be surprised what can turn up.
- If you're traveling from the United States to a city in France other than Paris or Nice, you need to connect. Consider your connections and price the legs of your trip carefully. When you buy an Air France transatlantic ticket, you're entitled to specific programs and passes that may lower your fare. When you buy a Delta ticket, you get the entire Air France network as part of a code share. Ask!
- British Airways is working very hard to promote and maintain London as a hub for European travel. You can often buy a ticket to a French destination by way of London, with a free layover . . . you may even get a couple free nights in a hotel.

- Yeah, the guys at British Airways are nice, but they aren't promoting London just to be nice. They're faced with stiff competition from the Eurostar train and low-cost carriers that fly into dozens of small French cities (as well as Belgium). Depending on your flexibility and your wallet, you may want to fly to London and wing it (so to speak) from there.
- Delta has a fabulous nonstop flight from New York to Nice, which is superb for getting to the Riviera or Provence (or even northern Italy). During the summer season, this flight is so popular that it is often full or blacked-out for upgrades with frequent-flier mileage. Book now!
- Speaking of miles: Note that during the off season, various airlines discount the number of miles you need to cash in for a ticket. You may also want to consider mileage promotions when you book your tickets: British Airways

customers recently earned triple mileage points on flights from the United Kingdom to France.

- If you think you can just book arrival in one airport and departure out another, and then pick up easy or inexpensive transport between cities, I beg you to think twice and to read the "Getting Around France" section, below. France isn't a very big country, but it's plenty big when it comes to driving or taking the train from Nice to Paris or Lyon to Bordeaux or Marseilles to Biarritz. And it's plenty expensive when it comes to buying a one-way plane ticket between cities. Try every trick you can think of when you price fares.

From the United Kingdom

Travel from Great Britain to France has always been a breeze, and the opening of the Chunnel has made it even breezier. This is the case not just for the obvious reason, but also because of the demand factor: Airlines and ferries are now engaged in price wars and promotional deals geared to woo travelers away from the convenient new train services, Le Shuttle and Eurostar, both of which are booked through **Eurail** (✆ **888/382-7245**). With all these deals, there are more and more options, and price possibilities, for easy, affordable connections from the United Kingdom.

The Chunnel offers two types of service: Eurostar, which is regular passenger service on a deluxe train, and Le Shuttle, which allows you to bring a car to France. Several car-rental companies even have packages that allow you to rent a car in Britain and drop it off in France. There are three kinds of service on the passenger train, at three different prices: economy, first, and premium. (Premium means you have a first-class seat and a taxi waiting for you at the station.) There are also promotional fares, especially in winter.

If you prefer to fly, the discount airline **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) offers service from London-Stansted to Paris, but may land at Beauvais airport (1 hr. north of Paris) or Orly. Ask before you get a surprise. Most of the low-cost

carriers originate in the United Kingdom, but not all (see below).

From Other European Locales

Using a point of entry outside France, even for travel mainly within France, can be attractive if your trip includes other international destinations or if you are bargain-hunting and like the looks of some of the other Euro airlines or code shares. With the merger of Air France and KLM, you get a lot of extra options.

EasyJet (www.easyjet.com) flies from various European destinations to Paris, Marseille, Toulouse, Lyon, and Nice. **Basiq Air** (www.basiqair.com) flies from Amsterdam to Bordeaux, Nice, and Marseille; and from Cologne to Paris and Nice. Remember, discount airlines go in and out of business rather quickly—and the airports they serve can also change—so use this information only as a jumping-off point.

GETTING AROUND FRANCE

By Plane

Air France has passes for unlimited travel that work much like train passes. Le France Pass allows you any seven flights in a 1-month period. Keep in mind that you can purchase these passes only when you also purchase an Air France transatlantic ticket.

Student and youth passes are also available.

Note that it costs less to fly on certain days of the week than on others, and that airlines offer all sorts of promotions. Look through French magazines and newspapers, even if you can't read French; if you see a travel ad with good prices, get your hotel concierge to translate. Also, because France is in the middle of various airfare wars, the newspapers often post price comparisons between Air France and its latest rivals. For example, if you compare the best prices offered by Air France

(which you might not get) and EasyJet, it looks something like this:

PARIS–NICE

Air France	165€	($190)
EasyJet	82€	($94)

PARIS–TOULOUSE

Air France	155€	($178)
EasyJet	76€	($87)

Be sure to know what airport you are using—especially with low-cost airlines, which often use alternative airports. For more on low-cost carriers, see "Getting There," above.

Tricky parts: Certain intra-France tickets must be booked in the U.S. before you take your transatlantic flight. But there are also deals for locals that are available only once you get here, so you might not want to book ahead. It's a game of nerves . . . with some French culture thrown in.

By Car

Car rentals that are pre-arranged in the United States are usually cheaper than any on-the-spot rentals you'll find in France. All major car-rental agencies have competitive deals for day-, week-, or month-long stays.

Tips: Don't assume that mileage is unlimited, that your car has automatic transmission, or that the price quoted includes tax or value-added tax (VAT). Ask and compare. Do not assume you and your luggage will fit into a Type A car—or even a Type B. Make sure you get the help-line phone number for the country or regions where you will be driving, and find out if English-language assistance is available.

Picking up (and returning) rental cars at major French airports can be much easier than using car-return offices at French train stations. Finding the train station in a major city can ruin your vacation. The bigger the city, the more train stations it

Parking Tips

Parking is almost never included in the price of a hotel room—even a hotel in the boonies. In Cannes, parking at a major hotel costs 30€ ($38) or more a night; in Bordeaux, it's a mere 10€ ($12). It is usually very difficult to park in resort cities. Should you be so lucky as to find a space, note that there are different types of spaces with different systems for paying. Make sure you understand the rules (see p. 45 for further details).

has, which means the more parts of town you have to drive through, the more one-way streets, the more chances to get lost, and the more stress. In one city, we actually hired a taxi driver to lead us to the train station.

When you pick up a car in France, do not congratulate yourself if you are upgraded to a larger car free of charge. The larger the car, the less easily it will make the corners in medieval towns.

ADA (www.ada.fr) is the biggest secret discovery I've made while living in France. This French car-rental agency is said to be the least expensive. It has an American partner, but is not called ADA in the States, and thus works as a co-op situation much like that of Kemwel. There are over a dozen ADA bureaus in central Paris, including locations at all major train stations.

I also like **Kemwel** (✆ **800/576-1590;** www.kemwel.com), which uses Citer in France. Note that cars must be booked in the U.S. There is a 3-day minimum, but don't let that slow you down—sometimes its 3-day rate is less expensive than a single day with another firm.

You can often find fly-and-drive packages that include airline tickets and car rental, as well as fly-train-drive packages that include airfare, a certain number of days of train travel, and car rental. With a fly-train-drive package, you can use the train to get out to the countryside and then pick up the car for the good stuff and the wonderful back roads.

Car-Rental Companies at a Glance

ADA	✆ **08-36-68-40-02** in France; www.ada.fr
Auto Europe	✆ **800/223-5555;** www.autoeurope.com
Auto France	✆ **800/572-9655;** www.auto-france.com
Avis	✆ **800/331-1084;** www.avis.com
Budget	✆ **800/527-0700;** www.budget.com
Eurodollar	✆ **800/800-6000**
Europcar	✆ **877/940-6900;** www.europcar.com
Hertz	✆ **800/654-3001;** www.hertz.fr
Kemwel	✆ **800/576-1590;** www.kemwel.com
National/Citer	✆ **800/227-7368;** www.citer.fr
Renault Eurodrive	✆ **800/221-1052;** www.renault-eurodrive.com

By Train

Train passes are incredibly convenient and easy to use. That ease may be worth dollars and cents to you. I've learned to never knock convenience, even if you have to pay for it. However, train passes equal their cost or save you money only if you use them on long hauls or if you plan your travels carefully.

Having a train pass that's good for 5 days of travel is downright stupid if it's used only for day trips from Paris or short hops to places such as Versailles, Chartres, Reims, or even Lyon. The pass costs far more than the individual legs would if you just walked into a French train station (or travel agent) and bought the tickets.

If you are undecided as to which offers better value—a train pass or a few single-leg tickets—try to get some idea of the fares on big-haul trips. Note that the really cheapo fares usually go to locals who buy 30 days in advance. Also remember that train passes and/or tickets in France pay for passage, but do not guarantee a seat! Even with a pass, you'll still need to make a reservation for a seat on the specific train you want; it's required

for all TGV and fast trains. You can get reservations in Paris, usually at 5€ ($5.75) a clip. (And yes, your dog needs one, too.)

Finally, no matter what type of ticket you use for a train in France, make sure you *composter* (validate) your ticket before you get on board. There is a hefty fine for not doing so, and playing "dumb American" will not work. *Composter* is such a perfect verb for this act that it is hard to translate; I guess it means "punch your ticket with an electronic hitching post." Near the entry to each train platform is an electronic post, painted bright yellow or orange. You place your ticket, with the magnetic strip up, into the slot. The machine automatically chomps on the ticket, punching an electronic nick, and spits it out. Congratulations, you have composted.

By Bus

Regional buses are a great option in places such as the south of France, where the cities aren't very far apart and the buses are cheap, frequent, and offer scenic rides. Consider, for example, taking the bus when traveling from Nice to Cannes, or from Avignon to Tarascon. There is no train service between St-Raphael and St-Tropez, so a bus is a handy idea there.

Also consider getting to airports by bus. If you can handle it, this will save you a lot of money, especially in the Nice area, where the taxis from the Nice airport to nearby cities are outrageously expensive.

By Boat

Be it cruise ship, yacht, or barge, there's no better way to get around France than boat, because you don't have to park the sucker yourself and you aren't stuck in a train station looking for a porter or a trolley.

I have developed a travel rule, which states that the amount of pleasure afforded by a specific destination in France is directly proportional to the difficulty of finding a parking space or negotiating the traffic jams there. When you travel by boat,

you usually arrive in—or are taken by the boat to—the cute part of town. I call it The Cute.

Aside from the cruise ships that regularly call in the south of France, some companies also offer a schedule of French Atlantic ports of call, such as an itinerary from Lisbon to London with four stops in France. The *Queen Mary 2* calls at Cherbourg.

Some 200,000 people per year barge around France, choosing to arrive in various cities by water and often eliminating the crowd problem by stopping at ports that are less congested than the Cote d'Azur. Barge trips move slowly, often feature a good chef, and are almost always sold as inclusive packages with air, land, meals, and so on. Shore excursions and tips are extra. Some barge trips specialize in antiquing, with itineraries that involve barging all night and shopping all day. They can also arrange to ship home your purchases. These trips take place most often in Burgundy, where prices on furniture are the best.

PHONING AROUND

Rather than using any of the U.S. telephone companies' direct-dial deals, which have fees attached to them, I simply buy a France Telecom phone card at any *tabac* (tobacco shop; pronounced ta-bah) or news kiosk and use pay phones, even to call the United States.

If you don't mind dialing a lot of code numbers, there are other phone cards that can be used from any telephone and offer big savings over hotel rates. These cards can also be bought at *tabacs*.

Another good bet is to buy a U.S. phone card (with AT&T or MCI service) at a place like Wal-Mart or Sam's Club. You can use these cards to call home from Europe.

Note: Your U.S. mobile phone will not work in France unless it is a three-band phone.

HOTEL DEALS IN FRANCE

Here are a few tips on getting hotel deals:

- The easiest way to book rooms for a multi-destination trip is through any of the hotel associations or chains that have properties all over France. Get it all done in just one phone call.
- The best ways to get a deal? Contact the general manager of the hotel directly and ask for the best price available. Or book through the chains and associations, asking if they have prices frozen in U.S. dollars and/or any promotional deals that offer extras or discounts. Once you know the national reservation system's best offer, you can sometimes get a better rate by then calling the specific hotel directly. Many small establishments do not have toll-free numbers or booking agencies in the U.S.—another reason to contact the hotel yourself.
- Inquire about hotel extras that may range from full breakfast (a better value than continental breakfast) to airport transfers to one free night for every so many nights you pay for. Express, for example, is very aggressive about getting its hotel partners to offer perks to guests who book and pay with Amex cards.
- Do not expect your travel agent to know every trick in the book or to be responsible for saving you money. Travel agents can be terrific—use a good one—but be willing to do some legwork yourself by using online sources, toll-free numbers, and brochures (one picture may save you from a mistake).

Hotel Chains in France

Almost every hotel offers a promotional rate on weekends. Paris hotels usually discount in July and August, while resort hotels may add surcharges in August or throughout summer.

If you're traveling with children, you might want to stick to modern hotels, which are usually bigger and provide more

beds and space in each room. Some hotels have lofts so that three or four can sleep in one unit. It is difficult to find a château room that fits a family of four.

Several hotel chains now specialize in "well-being" *(bien être)*—which means they have spas or offer spa packages. If you have serious work to do on your *forme*, you can even book packages for a week or 10 days.

ACCOR Accor is the holding company that owns six international hotel chains. The ones you will want to know about are the more upmarket properties, including **Sofitel** and **Mercure.** These usually four-star hotels are often cute, older places that were taken over and offer great location and some charm. Of course, there are modern high-rise hotels, too, but with those you almost always know what you are getting. Take a look at individual properties at www.accorhotel.com, www.sofitel.com, or www.mercure.com; call ✆ **800/221-4542** for reservations.

CHATEAUX & HOTELS DE FRANCE Do not confuse this brand with Relais & Châteaux (see below). This is an association of more than 500 hotels and restaurants. Most are the small and charming kind, but not all properties are equal, and sometimes the photos are better than the real thing. Check out www.chateauxhotels.com; call ✆ **800/553-5090** for reservations.

COMPAGNIE DES HOTELS DE MONTAGNE This is a tiny, family-run chain, but it's extremely luxe and just may have all the hotels you need to book. There are several properties in the mountain town of Megève—hence the name—with other hotels dotted around in Lyon, outside St-Tropez, and smack in the middle of Provence. For more information, go to www.c-h-m.com.

CONCORDE HOTELS This chain has changed a lot and I am no longer sure what's going on . . . but you can contact the U.S. offices (✆ **800/888-4747;** www.concorde-hotels.com) and ask. Concorde owns the Crillon and other nice Paris hotels, as well as several properties dotted all over France.

HILTON There are six Hilton hotels in France, so this chain makes the most sense if you are visiting France and the surrounding area: Brussels, Barcelona, and Geneva. Indeed, if you look at a map, Geneva is almost in France, making it a practical solution for some overnight visits. The most exciting development is the gorgeous new Hilton Arc de Triomphe, which offers the best value for the money in Paris and comes complete with many Hilton benefits. All Hiltons in France are modern or post-modern; two are located at Paris's airports. Call ✆ **800/HILTONS** or go to www.hilton.com.

INTER-CONTINENTAL The Inter-Continental (✆ **800/327-0200;** www.interconti.com) is one of my secret ways to afford a luxury hotel in Paris. This chain doesn't have a lot of properties in France, but if you're only going to Paris and Cannes, you may be quite happy with one phone call.

LEADING HOTELS OF THE WORLD Leading Hotels (✆ **800/223-6800;** www.lhw.com) is my main squeeze and frequently the only place I need to call anywhere in the world. This group has the fanciest and best hotels, although they do tend to be the large, flashy kind. If the prices are over your budget, check out corporate plans, promotional deals, or seasonal specials.

LE MERIDIEN This world-famous chain has a French name but British management. Never mind. It often has good promotional deals, and while Le Meridien (✆ **800/543-4300;** www.lemeridien.com) doesn't have heaps of hotels across France, it does have properties in key cities such as Paris, Nice, and even Juan-les-Pins on the Riviera (right near Cannes).

RELAIS & CHATEAUX These fine châteaux with wonderful chefs are a dream come true. Many people consider the Relais & Châteaux (✆ **800/735-2478;** www.relaischateaux.fr) catalog to be their bible for planning a trip to France; indeed, it could even be sold as a coffee-table book. Its member hotels are more consistently uniform than those in larger associations. Note the various spa packages available.

MONEY MATTERS

As we go to press, the euro is unusually strong and the dollar terribly weak, making prices seem painful. If you are visiting many E.U. countries in one trip, you will save money by not having to repeatedly exchange currency; but for the simple transaction between $ and €, it's not a pretty sight.

Currency Exchange

To get the best rate of exchange, you should use a credit card rather than cash, and withdraw what cash you need from an ATM. Here are some other tips:

- Buy traveler's checks in euros if you don't expect the dollar to gain dramatically.
- Don't walk around with tons of cash on you, but remember that you are paying a fee each time you use an ATM (unless your bank card allows for free international withdrawals). Your bank and the bank whose ATM you're using usually charge a total of $5 per transaction; nonetheless, an ATM is still often the best way to get cash.
- Shop rates at money changers and *cambios*—they aren't all the same. If you find a good rate, stick with the winner. A good *cambio* can be better than a bank for changing money.
- Avoid those cute foreign machines that look like ATMs but ask you to insert cash (U.S. dollars or currency from the last country you visited) in order to receive the local currency.
- After you return home, keep watching your credit card bills for accurate charges and refunds. Don't be alarmed if it takes a while for stores in smaller towns to post your charges with the credit card company—it can get quite laid-back in the French countryside. One May I bought a dress at Galeries Lafayette in Nice; it appeared on my January bill the next year. Now there's a float.

- If the dollar gains strength after you've made prepayments on your trip expenses, don't beat yourself up over the fact. Let it go, and have a good time anyway.

Détaxe

If you are making a big purchase, you'll want to get a value-added tax (VAT) refund. VAT is called TVA in France, and it's a whopping 19.6%. You are entitled to a refund of approximately 12% to 13% if you spend about 175€ ($201) or more in one day in the same store. This refund is called *détaxe*.

Some stores let you accumulate receipts from their various departments, as long as you spend the total in one day in one store (a reason why you might want to shop in department stores).

The refund is granted only to visitors who live outside the E.U. and who take the goods out of the country within 3 months of purchase. You must show the goods to Customs officials when you depart the E.U.; if you travel beyond France to another E.U. country before returning to the United States, you claim the refund in the last country you visit—even if you didn't buy anything there.

Although the refund can be given to you in cash at the airport, if you go this route, you will probably lose money on the exchange rate. The best way to get a refund is to have it put directly onto your credit card. Simply mark the appropriate box on the refund forms.

Major French department stores have offices that handle the refund papers at the time of purchase. Allow at least 20 minutes (much longer in summer) to complete the paperwork. Outside Paris, retail staff may not speak English and may not be familiar with the paperwork. Stores that sell luxury goods (including perfumeries) are very familiar with the refund process and can usually supply the papers—and a lesson in how to fill them out, if needed—in a minute or two.

Warning: You might decide to make a purchase based on the fact that you think—or the salesperson convinces you—that

you will get an almost 20% discount, by getting the entire 19.6% TVA back via *détaxe*. However, this rarely happens. Very few retailers refund the entire amount of the tax. Big department stores tell you up front that all you get back is 12% because of the fee charged for doing the paperwork; other firms may keep it more hidden that they take a commission.

Tipping Tips

In France, you basically tip the same number of euros that you'd give in dollars back in the U.S. Because times have been tough here, people are more dependent on tips than they were in the past, and in some cases—especially in Paris, in resort destinations, and at luxury hotels—the amount expected for a tip has doubled in the past couple years. Here are the basics of tipping in France:

- Tip 2€ ($2.30) per bag to the bellhop who handles the luggage in a luxury hotel, 1€ ($1.15) in a lesser property.
- Give 1€ ($1.15) to a doorman for hailing a taxi.
- Round up your taxi fare to add a little bit. I don't give a percentage, but I never give less than .50€ (60¢).
- Give a few euros extra at the hairdresser for cut or color. The shampoo person gets 2€ ($2.30).
- In restaurants, I usually leave 5€ ($5.75) cash as an additional tip on a dinner bill for two people in a fancy place with stellar service. If it's just a snack, coffee, lunch, or not a big deal, 1€ to 3€ ($1.15–$3.45) will do, depending on the size of the bill and how long you sat there.

U.S. Customs & Duties Tips

To make your re-entry into the United States as smooth as possible, follow these tips:

- Know the rules—and stick to them!
- Don't try to smuggle anything.

- Be polite and cooperative (up until the point when they ask you to strip, anyway).

Also remember the following:

- You are currently allowed to bring home $800 worth of merchandise duty-free. Each member of the family is entitled to this amount, including infants. You may pool within a family.
- You pay a flat 10% duty on the next $1,000 worth of merchandise.
- Duties thereafter are based on a product-type basis. This varies tremendously per item, so consider each purchase and ask storekeepers about U.S. duties.
- The head of the family can make a joint declaration for all family members. Whoever is the head of the family, however, should take the responsibility of answering any questions the Customs officers may ask. Answer questions honestly, firmly, and politely. Have receipts ready, and make sure they match the information on your landing card. Don't try to tell a story that won't wash under questioning. If the Customs officers catch you in a little lie, you'll be labeled as a fibber, and they'll tear your luggage apart.
- Have the Customs registration slips for your personally owned goods handy in your wallet or otherwise easily accessible. If you wear a Cartier watch, be able to produce the registration slip. If you cannot prove that you took a previously owned French-made item out of the country with you, then you may be forced to pay duty on it.
- The unsolicited gifts you mail from abroad do not count in the $800-per-person rate. If the value of a gift is more than $50, the recipient pays duty when the package arrives. You're allowed only one unsolicited package per person, and you can't mail gifts to yourself.
- Do not attempt to bring any illegal food items back to the U.S.—dairy products, meats, fruits, or vegetables (coffee is

okay). Generally speaking, if it's alive, it's verboten. I also shouldn't need to tell you that it's tacky to bring in drugs and narcotics.

- Antiques must be at least 100 years old to be duty-free. Provenance papers help you get the item through Customs, and so does permission to export the antiquity, since it could be an item of national cultural significance. Any bona fide work of art is duty-free, whether it was painted 50 years ago or just yesterday; the artist need not be famous.
- Dress for success. People who look like hippies get stopped at Customs more than average folks. Equally suspicious are those women who look like a million dollars, dragging their fur coats and Gucci handbags and luggage with first-class tags—but who declare they have bought nothing.
- Laws regarding ivory are new and improved—for the elephants, anyway. You may not bring any ivory into the United States. Antique ivory must have provenance papers to be legally imported.

Chapter Three

FRENCH LESSONS

HOW TO BE FRENCH

Okay, you don't really want to be French. You just want to know enough to not make a fool of yourself, to have a good time, and to prevent being cheated, laughed at, or scorned.

Although you would have to live in France longer than a week or two to get into the cultural differences and to begin to understand French thinking, you can learn some of the most basic facts of life by taking my crash course.

You'll find that French people aren't rude, but they do live by a series of rules and social codes that are very different from American (and even British) rules and codes. When we don't know their rules, French people are offended—or amused. If they are offended and show it, we then assume they're rude. If you plan to sail through France without interacting with the people, you might do fine. Otherwise, I suggest you *bonne* up.

Below is a brief dictionary of French life and style. It includes some important French lessons, such as how to tell the difference between the menu and *la carte,* among other things.

Once you know how to act, you'll be ready to shop, so this chapter also includes an alphabetical rundown of the major French boutiques and chains.

GUIDE TO FRENCH LIFE & STYLE

A/R (ALLER/RETOUR) This means round-trip and usually appears after the price for a plane or train ticket. Do not assume that a one-way fare is half the cost of a round-trip fare.

AUCTIONS The basic auction business has been changed by new French laws and is no longer a government-run monopoly. France has a tradition of accessible auction houses that are not nearly as intimidating as Christie's and Sotheby's, which is great if you prefer the small-country kind of auction or funky merchandise.

Of course, there are other sorts of auctions. Among the most famous is a wine auction held on the third weekend of November in the town square of the medieval town of Beaune, in Burgundy. The annual event, celebrated since 1859, raises funds for the local hospice and serves to set the regional wine prices for that year's harvest. It's a big mob scene of tasting and touring, and you don't have to bid in order to join the party. Call ✆ **03-80-26-21-30** for details.

AUTOROUTE France is connected by a series of toll highways, autoroutes, which are the closest thing to an American freeway, a British motorway, or a German autobahn. Some autoroutes offer only one lane in each direction, but in most cases the roads are similar to American highways. Autoroutes are designated by the letter *a* before their route number, and they also can be marked *peage*, which means toll road. The tolls, which are very steep, can be paid in cash or by credit card.

A VOLONTE All you can eat. Certain dishes (often the oysters and the chocolate mousse) are priced at a flat rate, and you can just keep shoveling it in.

BCBG (BON CHIC BON GENRE) This means preppy and is usually used to describe a style of clothing.

BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU This is a brilliant marketing plan to get people to drink young wine. The new wine is uncorked on the third Thursday of November, usually around the 15th.

The exact date, which varies each year to add to the fun, is announced and celebrated throughout France. Festivities begin around 5pm the night before the big day, with official sales beginning as the clock turns to midnight. (So if the third Thurs of Nov is the 15th, then the party starts on Wed the 14th and lasts until midnight, at which time the stores open and the party continues.)

The event has become international in the world of spirits and is even big in Paris. It's not unusual to spot *le nouveau est arrivé* signs here and there—even in New York.

BIDET If Mother told you it was for washing your socks, she lied. Even if Mother told you the truth, she probably didn't tell you how to use it. I mention this because I was shocked by one of the finer details: You stand facing the wall. The rest is pretty basic.

BOURJOIS This is a dime-store brand of makeup sold at every Monoprix and department store in France. The line also has some international distribution (it's sold in Sephora stores in the United States). Bourjois is not low-cost, but is affordable (and less expensive in France than elsewhere). Plus it comes with its very own secret: Chanel makeup is made in the same factories. There are differences between the two brands, of course, but they aren't as big as the price difference.

BROCANTE There is an enormous difference between a *brocanteur* and a person who sells antiques, so heads up, everyone. An antiques dealer sells *antiquités,* which are important pieces from previous times. *Brocante* is junk. It is usually sold at flea markets or during the *brocante* day at the local *marché* (market). It is sold by anyone and carries no particular provenance or value.

CAPOTES ANGLAISES Slang for condoms.

CARRELAGE French for tile.

CARTE We all know that a la carte means off the menu—or at least that's what it means to an American. To the French, the menu is the list of the set meals for the day, and the *carte*

is the rest of the offerings. In short, what you think is the menu is really the *carte!*

CENTRE VILLE You'll often see this on signs; it means downtown. Sometimes it's written as VILLE PROPRE.

CHAMPAGNE Mere alcohol doesn't thrill me at all. But start singing about the night they invented Champagne, and let me sing along, off-key, and explain it all in simple terms.

First, Champagne is a *département* of France—a very particular part of the French map and some very specific real estate. If the grapes aren't grown in this zip code, then the bubbly they make just ain't champagne.

The word has become synonymous with the type of sparkling wine made in the Champagne region, but no wine can legally claim to be "champagne" unless the grapes grew to maturation in Champagne. Thus, you have scads of champagne-like drinks that aren't really champagne; rather, they are made with the *méthode champenoise*.

CHARIOT French word for the luggage handcart or trolley at train stations, airports, and grocery stores. Sometimes they are free, and sometimes they cost 1€ or 2€ ($1.15–$2.30) (horde coins in these amounts—you can never find one when you need one). The big grocery stores charge for use of their shopping carts; you get your money back only when you return the cart to the line and click it back in place. You forfeit your money if you leave the cart in the parking lot.

COCA-COLA Just ask for *un coca*. But if you're on a budget, forget it. The average price of a Coke at a bar in any decent hotel in France is 5€ ($5.75)—and it can go higher. You can buy a six-pack of Coke in any grocery store for about 2.50€ ($2.90).

COOKING CLASSES For gastronomy classes at **Le Cordon Bleu,** in Paris, call ✆ **800/457-CHEF** in the U.S., or go to www.cordonbleu.net.

The **Ecole Ritz Escoffier** (www.ritzparis.com), at the Hotel Ritz in Paris, has its own cooking classes and even offers a

program for kids. One look at the brochure, and you'll be in heaven. There are also lectures and events; this is not just a ladies' thing. Call ✆ **800/996-5758** in the U.S.

A number of French food-related tours are organized in the U.S. **Annemarie Victory** (✆ **212/486-0353**) is a travel agent in New York who specializes in a wide range of international deluxe specialty tours, including a variety of top-flight gourmet food and wine-tasting tours in France. **France in Your Glass** (✆ **800/578-0903**) specializes in wine tours but also offers some cooking and eating tours. A variety of options are available, including day trips, weekends you can add to your own trip, and even kitchen visits. **European Culinary Adventures** (✆ **800/852-2625** or 508/535-5738) offers country kitchen tours, which range from a barge trip and stays at local inns to visits to farms and vineyards.

COPPER (CUIVRE) French cooking is widely associated with copper pots, which have been used locally for centuries because of the evenness of the heat conduction. Villedieu-les-Poêles, a small town near Mont-St-Michel, is known for the best copper pots in France, but you can find fabulous copper for sale at any *brocante* in France.

When buying copper pots, judge the quality of the pot by how thick the copper is, and make sure the copper is the same thickness all over. Check to see if the pot or pan has been patched or repaired. Look to see how the handles are attached and if the rivets go into the inside of the pot (which is bad). Also remember that it takes more than a little elbow grease to clean up an old copper pot.

COUCHETTE If the first phrase you ever learned in French was "*Voulez vous coucher avec moi?*" (Will you go to bed with me?), then you haven't booked an overnight train in France. Yes, a *couchette* is a bed, but in train parlance, it's a bunk bed, and there are usually six—stacked three and three—in each train. A wagon-lit is a real bed in a real sleeping car.

CREPES To an American, any French pancake is a crepe. Actually, there are two types: meal crepes, which are usually made

of buckwheat flour, and dessert crepes, which are made of white flour.

DEGRIFFE A *griffe* is a signature, or label, in France. Clothes sold without labels, à la Loehmann's, are sold *dégriffé;* the stores that sell them are also called *dégriffé.* This is another way to spell "bargains" in French. Not by a long shot do all *dégriffé* shops sell designer names. Every now and then, though, you'll find one that advertises itself as *haute*—this means it sells designer clothing.

DEGUSTATION Most fancy restaurants have a *menu dégustation* (tasting menu) whereby you are served many courses and get to experience the many talents of the featured chef. Beware that these events usually take forever and offer far more food than a human was ever intended to eat. Furthermore, you can wait up to an hour between courses if you get unlucky. I'm not saying don't do it; I'm saying watch out and have plenty of time on your hands. Elastic waistbands also help.

DEPOT-VENTE This is a used-clothing store, often specializing in designer resale. A handful of resale stores in Paris, Cannes, and the bigger cities of France will make you swoon with their selection and fair prices. Others specialize in antiques.

DUTY-FREE Paris has a slew of duty-free makeup and perfume stores that offer great discounts (a total of about 35% off) to non-E.U. residents. More traditional are the general duty-free stores at airports and the duty-free offerings made on airplanes. Intra-European duty-free sales were outlawed in 1999, but if you are leaving the E.U., you can buy duty-free goods at the airport.

ELECTRICITY There's no shortage of electricity in France (nuclear power!), but there is a shortage of people who have recovered from their post–World War II deprived childhood. Don't be shocked if the lights are off in the hallway. Feel around to find the switch, and voilà—you have limited lighting on a timer.

EURO At press time, 1€ equaled about $1.15, but this will fluctuate. Note that euros are used only within the euro-zone

countries, which means that many members of the E.U. still do not use euros.

FAIENCE Hand-painted ceramic earthenware identified with country France. Some regional painting styles are more famous than others, especially those made in Marseille in the 1860s. The designs mostly consist of flowers on a white background. French faience is decidedly different from Italian faience and is usually simpler, with a larger portion of white background. There is a museum of faience in Marseille.

Expect to pay approximately 17€ to 39€ ($20–$45) for a new faience plate. Antique wares are considerably higher.

Because they are earthenware (clay, not porcelain), they break easily, so pack with care or carry by hand.

The major French faience cities are Rouen, Nevers, Gien, Nîmes, and Moustier-Ste-Marie. Salernes is thought of as the capital of tiles, whether earthenware or hand-painted. However, deepwater trade to Brittany also affected local pottery there, so northwestern Atlantic France has its own regional faience and pottery styles, which are best known to Americans through Quimper.

As for basic design points: Moustier is mostly known for storytelling pictures; Quimper has peasant figures; and Rouen features Arabic-influenced lace-edged patterns with arabesques and elaborate borders. Note that Gien faience is not earthenware but white paste, similar to English bone china. Gien patterns are very elaborate and are partially transferred by copper engraving (like English Staffordshire) and then hand-painted. This gives a much more sophisticated image than what you get when a local artisan paints a cock in the center of a plate.

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM (FIF) Held in Cannes for 2 weeks in the middle of May (the dates vary slightly each year), the FIF takes over the town. Although it is virtually impossible to get a decent hotel room in Cannes during the festival, you can write ahead for movie tickets and get a room in Nice. Write **International Film Festival,** Service d'Accreditation, 99 bd. Malesherbes, 75008, Paris, France; or

fax 01-45-61-97-60 (www.festival-cannes.fr). It's virtually impossible to get into the official competition screenings, but there are so many other screenings that it's worth a shot. Don't forget your tux and dark glasses, darling.

FEVE The word in French actually means "bean," but shoppers know this as a collectible that's best found in a French flea market. To celebrate Epiphany, French bakeries make *galette des rois,* cakes in which an ornamental bean is placed. If you get the piece of cake with the *fève,* you are the king or queen and get to wear a paper crown. The *fève* itself represents life and death. It's a symbol that stands for fertility, goodwill among humankind, happiness, and peace.

Not only is this popular with French children, but various firms also market different types of *fèves* for promotional purposes. Tiny porcelain *fèves* can be bought at flea markets and are collectors' items.

FRENCH LETTERS More condoms.

FRENCH MAGAZINES To subscribe to French magazines in French (from France!) at your home in the United States, call **Express Mag** (✆ **800/363-1310**). French *Elle,* which comes out weekly, costs about 175€ ($200) per year. The women's supplement to *Le Figaro,* called *Madame Figaro* (also weekly), is over 350€ ($400) a year, exactly what it would cost you to buy it every week in France—you just don't get the Saturday newspaper that comes with it.

FROUFROU This is a legitimate style in France, and it means just what you think: overbearingly decorated with swags, bows, ribbons, ruffles, and the like.

FRUITS CONFIT Close, but you're wrong—this is not *confiture* (jam) made of fruits. Fruits confit are essentially jellied fruit, a regional specialty in the south of France. Instead of being dried, the fruits are soft and a little gooey—often covered with a sprinkled-sugar crust. Their natural liquids have been drained and they have been immersed in fresh sugar water for about a month. Nonfattening, of course.

GALETTES Galettes literally means cookies. Each region of France has its own specialty galette. An important part of your research as you travel will be to test them all. The differences in taste are usually related to the proportion of butter in the dough, which ranges from about 18% to 35%.

GAS If you are driving across France, you will do well to watch the fuel gauge and start thinking about where you can fill 'er up when you have a quarter of a tank left. This will allow you to be a little bit choosy and to plan your course to include a stop at the gas station of a *hypermarché*. You will usually need to follow signs to get to one, which will be off the autoroute but not sufficiently far as to be avoided. Unleaded gas is called *sans plomb;* it is sold in either 95 or 98 proof. Few cars need 98. If your car needs diesel fuel, buy *gaz*.

GIBIER This means game, as in game season in late fall and early winter, when restaurants feature game and stores may even get into the act, with either promotions or window displays. I once saw a store window filled with stuffed rabbits wearing clothes! These were real dead rabbits, not plush toys. The entire concept of game season takes France by storm, especially in the northern regions.

GITE This is a small cottage, the home of a real person, or a funky place that you can rent in lieu of a hotel. There are agencies in France that rent them to Americans, although you are taking a blind chance. There are approximately 60,000 properties offered for rent, and the French government does not regulate them or the listing firms. *Bonne chance!*

GRANDS MAGASINS No, this isn't a particularly thick or overly fancy issue of *Vogue*. The big department stores are called *les grands magasins*. Sometimes ads don't list specific suppliers but simply say *les grands magasins*. Mostly this means Galeries Lafayette and Au Printemps.

H2O It's water, and in France when you drink it from a bottle, it can either be *plate* (flat), which is also called *sans gas,* or *avec gas,* which is the bubbly kind. Many people order bottled water by brand name to indicate that they know the terrain

and the types. Say Evian or Vittel to indicate that you like flat water. Say Badoit or Perrier, and you'll get bubbly water. If the house does not carry those brands, the waiter will counter with the brands the house offers. To get tap water (which is perfectly safe to drink), request *un carafe d'eau.*

HERBS DE PROVENCE Sold in bundles, jars, or even glass containers, these spice gift packs are a mixture of the indigenous herbs of Provence and include rosemary, thyme, bay leaves, and savory—often crushed and blended but sometimes sold as dried twigs.

HONEY Provençal honey is considered the best in France because the bees buzzed around lavender before they made their little combs. Look for the label MIEL DE LAVANDE. Labels marked LABEL ROUGE are the best quality.

HYPERMARCHE Americans may have supermarkets and even warehouse clubs, but no one has *hypermarchés* like the French do: Think of a Super Wal-Mart combined with a Super Target—the clerks are on in-line skates and there are usually a hundred checkout counters. They sell everything for the home, the office, the fashion freak, and the gourmet. A handful of French *hypermarchés* tried to make it in the United States and failed. To this day, I do not understand why.

These giant supermarkets rival the original concept of a general store, but are all modern convenience without a bit of French charm. Part of the *hypermarché* is a grocery store, part of it is a hardware store, and part sells dry goods, such as clothes and linens and household equipment. There's always a gas station outside, and usually a car and tire center as well.

To buy fruits, veggies, or anything that has to be weighed, place your choice in a plastic bag and then go to a nearby weighing station with a clerk. He or she will weigh your purchase, staple the bag closed, and mark the price. Goods are not weighed at the checkout lane as in America.

JOKER A highly discounted type of train ticket, which even applies to Eurostar trains. (See "Getting Around France," in

chapter 2, for train information.) The ticket is very restricted, but if you can plan ahead, you'll save a heap.

LAGUIOLE A type of deluxe knife, far more chic than a Swiss Army knife. Laguiole is not a brand name or a trademark, it's simply a type of knife. That's one of the reasons so many variations are available—pocketknife, carving knife, even the new Lady Laguiole and a very chic corkscrew—and why new ones keep coming along. Even Philippe Starck has created one. Some of the knives are made in the town of Thiers and some in Laguiole.

LAMPES BERGER Think of a chic oil lamp, and you've got the idea—only this version doesn't burn oil, it burns scent. It wipes out odors caused by smokers, pets, humidity, and so on. Every French home has one or more. The firm has its own flagship store in Paris, and Galeries Lafayette carries a huge selection as well. Genevieve Lethu has her own designs in each of her shops all over France. Fancy design and home-furnishings stores in resort towns also carry some versions. The lamp itself, which comes in lots of styles, costs anywhere from 35€ to 87€ ($40–$100). There are 20 different scents. It's illegal to bring the fluid on a plane, but you can order it in the United States by calling ✆ **800/321-0020.**

LAVENDER The patron flower of Provence, lavender has a soothing scent and is thought to help induce sleep. It grows in abundance in the Luberon region, where it is harvested the first week in August. Tourists are regularly harvested of their souvenir budget in every town in the south of France—actually, lavender is sold in TTs (tourist traps) all over France, where the most common form is a cellophane-wrapped string of lavender-filled cotton sachets. Note that there is a technical difference between *lavandre* and *lavandin*—the latter is produced at lower altitudes and is more plentiful (it's what most of us think of as lavender). Real lavender is more expensive and lasts longer.

MARCHE A *marché* is almost always a fruit and vegetable market at which regional foodstuffs (such as honey, jam, and olive oil) are also sold. A supermarket is never called a *marché*.

MARCHE AUX PUCES A flea market. There may be some vendors selling cooked foods, crepes, or soft drinks, but there are no fruit-and-veggie stands.

MAXI CHOCOLAT A giant *pain au chocolat* (see below), easily measuring 5 by 7 inches, if not more.

MICHELIN A tire company that got the brilliant idea to promote driving around the countryside by writing books about nice places to stop to eat. Its system of awarding stars to the best chefs has become such an important commentary that the announcement of each new annual edition is a major news story. Stars range from one to three, and there are fewer than two dozen three-star chefs. When chefs are mentioned along with the number of stars they have earned, those stars are only from Michelin. No one else's really count. (Gault Millaut gives toques; they do count.)

MIMOSA A small yellow polka dot of sugar, about the size of a saccharine tablet, used to sweeten coffee or tea in the south of France. Mimosas are usually served by spoon from a sugar bowl, and they may also be served mixed with candied violets. I just bought a jar of them, marketed by Fauchon, in a Paris grocery store for 8.70€ ($10). Great gift item.

MINITEL This is a French information service. Minitel addresses are listed in phone books, on ads and billboards, and even on business cards, telling you where to go online (for a fee) to receive more information. Theater tickets, train tickets, airline tickets, and so on can be booked online via Minitel. With increasing Internet use, Minitel is now used less frequently—but the access codes remain printed in ads and the phone book.

NOUGAT Candy made from caramelized honey with nuts and/or dried fruits added. Each region of France and each maker has a slightly different variety, based on what types of nuts, seeds, or fruits are grown locally. The candy is often sold from stalls at markets or roadside stands in the south of France. Many makers also sell their own honey.

OLIVE OIL Olive oil is serious stuff in Mediterranean regions. The best kind is extra-virgin. You may also be given

a choice between one that is *douce* (sweet) or regular. Americans often prefer the sweet one. You can buy it directly from the *moulin* (mill); it's cheaper if you bring your own container. High-quality extra-virgin olive oil is expensive.

PAIN AU CHOCOLAT This is an envelope of light and flaky croissant dough filled with melted chocolate.

PANIER Technically this means a basket. When you go to a store and want one of those plastic shopping baskets for your things, it's called a *panier.*

PARADOX Also sometimes referred to as the French Paradox, this is the noted phenomenon that French people eat a lot of rich foods and drink wine yet don't die of heart attacks at a higher rate than anyone else. Supposedly this is because the tannin, or something or other, in red wine cuts through the cholesterol or the fat cells or something. Can't drink? *Pas de problem*—there are Paradox pills. Honest.

PARAPHARMACIES These large discount drugstores are the latest trend in Paris and are also spreading to the provinces. They sell an enormous selection of drugstore-brand makeup, skin-care, health, diet, and beauty products at 20% off.

PARKING Parking lots are marked with the letter P. There's usually an electronic message board out front that tells you whether the lot is *complet* (full) or exactly how many spaces are available. Rather ingenious.

In traditional parking lots, you take a ticket as you enter. You usually pay for the ticket before you get back in your car to leave; few lots in France have drive-out tellers as in the United States. If there is a long line at the *caisse* (cashier), see if there is a machine on a nearby wall that allows you to insert your ticket, pay for it, and have it canceled. You show the canceled ticket as you leave.

To pay for street parking, first park your car and then find the ticket machine attached to a nearby wall. Buy a ticket for the amount of time you estimate you will need. Return to your car and attach the ticket inside your car on the driver's side of the windshield. Then lock your car. Note that because clever

thieves have learned how to rob these machines, there is a new trend toward electronic smart cards, which you must buy ahead of time; this is annoying for tourists. Parking is expensive in France—expect to pay 1€ ($1.15) per half-hour at a metered space.

When a French presidential election approaches, jokers run wild. It is tradition for the incoming president to excuse all parking fines and tickets. Locals, who park just about anyplace under normal circumstances, have a wild time.

Speaking of parking fines, I have decided that the police can identify a rental car by the code in its license plate, and that you are much more likely to be ticketed if you have this type of plate. I actually paid one of my parking tickets just to be able to tell you how to do so, should you feel compelled to do the same.

To pay a ticket:

- Go to a *tabac* (tobacco shop) and present the ticket.
- Pay the fine to the salesperson, who will give you two sets of stamps.
- Fix half the stamps to one page of the ticket and half the stamps to the other page.
- Mail the part that is addressed to be mailed, and keep the other part as proof that you have paid the ticket.

PASTIS This liqueur is the most disgusting beverage I've had in a long time, but there's a resurgence in interest in this local French drink—considered a spring and summer drink by some—and there's even an "in" brand: Henri Bardouin. It starts out clear; then you add water, and it turns cloudy.

PERFUME Perfume accidentally came to France via the glove industry. It seems that in the Middle Ages, M'lady always kept her hands in kid gloves, but the tanning process produced fine kid gloves that smelled yucky. In order to make life bearable for Madame, the glove makers (conveniently located in the town of Grasse, near Cannes) created floral essences that

would blot out that nasty waxy yellow buildup. Before they knew it, the perfume industry was born. Grasse remains the industrial center of the industry, although the best buys in terms of discount and duty-free stores are in Paris.

People have written whole books on this subject, but I'll just pass on a few tidbits you might not know:

- Why does French perfume of the same brand smell different in Europe than in the United States? French perfume has a different chemical composition than the U.S. version; it is made with potato alcohol, which is organic. Supposedly this produces a cleaner version of the scent that wears better than the U.S. version, which is made with synthetic alcohol.
- If you can't afford true perfume, which is which after that? Perfume is very pricey because of the ingredients and because of all the money they have to pay Shalom Harlow to be in the ads. All the derivatives move away from the original scent in a matter of generations. *Parfum* is the most concentrated, then comes *eau de parfum,* then *eau de toilette,* then *voile de toilette.* Prices decrease in the same order.
- Are there any bargains out there? Well, 100ml of a fragrance does not cost much more than 50ml—a marketing ploy that makes it smart for you to buy the larger bottle and get twice as much for less than twice the price.
- Where should you buy your perfume in France? The duty-free store at the airport is one of your worst choices, friends. Very best is any of the big-time discounters in Paris, which offer 25% to 30% off list price regardless of how much you buy. Then, if you qualify for *détaxe,* you get another 15% off. Airport discounts are usually 13% to 15%, so even in the south of France, where there aren't too many discounters, if you find someone who will give you 20% off (not counting *détaxe*), you'll do better than at the airport.

PILLS The French seem to think there's a magic pill for just about everything. It's common practice to self-prescribe homeopathic remedies galore. You can find pills for getting a

suntan, pills to prevent wrinkles (Catherine Deneuve takes them), pills to banish cellulite, and so on. The pills Deneuve takes are called Oenobiol capsules and are sold in every pharmacy. However, Oenobiol makes a variety of pills for a variety of beauty flaws, so read the package carefully.

POCHETTE This is a pocket square worn in a men's jacket. Hermès makes them.

POISSON D'AVRIL For years I have wondered why chocolate fish are sold in France in the spring. First I thought it was a beach gimmick or maybe a religious thing. No, it's just Poisson d'Avril, April Fish—the French equivalent of April Fool's Day, also celebrated on April 1st.

POMMEAU You know that metal hose spritzer thing attached to the taps in French bathtubs that you hate? You may call it the telephone type of shower. It's technically called a *pommeau.*

PONT *Pont* is the French word for bridge. Also, what Americans call a long weekend is known as a *pont* to the French, and it can affect restaurant and store openings, especially in May.

POTERIE Although hand-painted ceramics are an art form in France—as they are the world over—local shops that carry *poterié,* especially in the south of France, usually sell simple, monochromatic earthenware that is glazed brown, blue, green, or ochre—the colors of the region. Painted *poterié* is called *faience.*

RED FRUITS You will frequently, especially in summer, be offered desserts, or even teas, *aux fruits rouges,* which is a composition of strawberries, raspberries, red currants, and blueberries. Those are considered the four red fruits, and they always come in that combination, unless otherwise stipulated on the *carte.*

RESERVATIONS You know to make a reservation for dinner, possibly even for lunch, but don't forget to make one for the train. Train fares are much lower if reservations are made in France rather than in the United States.

ROND POINT Although you may know this as a particular spot in Paris, at the beginning of the Champs-Elysées, actually any roundabout (or rotary) on any French road is a *rond point* and is referred to as such on signs.

RUDE They're not rude—you don't speak French.

SANTON Close your eyes and picture a traditional Christmas crèche. Okay, those little figures of the wise men, the sheep, and the baby Jesus are what the French call *santons*. The craftspeople who make these have put a regional spin on the art by adding local characters from any village to the basic nativity bunch.

The tradition is basically from Provence, although *santons* are sold all over the south of France. *Santons* are made of brightly painted clay or wood; some are embellished with fabric and even twigs or dried fruits. Prices vary with size, quality of carving, and detail of painting. Most popular *santons* are only about 2 inches tall and cost 8.70€ to 16€ ($10–$18) each. A basic crèche may be sold as a set.

Note that aside from the traditional figurines in a crèche, there is nothing religious about the rest of the figures—they are purely simple village folk, from the woman who comes to market with her cauliflower in hand to the glazier who uses a trumpet to attract customers.

Marcel Carbonel is perhaps the most famous *santon* craftsman; his workshop is in Marseille (see "Provençal Crafts," in chapter 7). A small paperback guide to his creations also serves as a common dictionary of the characters now thought to compose an entire collection. This book costs about 13€ ($15) and is in French and English; it's sold in many tourist shops and bookstores.

SAVON DE MARSEILLE Traditional French soap, usually sold in a square cube measured by the gram. When comparing prices, make sure you have noted the differences in size. The soap should be composed of 72% oil, which may be imprinted (in French) on the cube.

La Compagnie de Provence, located in Marseille (see chapter 7), is one of the national heroes of soap making. Others

located in Provence include L'Occitane (whose factory is at 21 rue Grande, Manosque) and Savonnerie Marius Fabre (whose factory is at 148 av. Grans, Salon-de-Provence).

SERVICE COMPRIS This means the service (that is, the tip) is included in the cost of a meal, as is the tax. Therefore, the price listed on the bill is the price you pay, totally inclusive. However, it is common, especially in fine restaurants or when service has been attentive or personal, to leave a few extra euros in cash on the table.

SOLDES This means sales. French stores tend to have only two sales a year. Traditional spring sales usually begin the last week in June and extend through the first week in July. Traditional winter sales are at the end of January, after Epiphany. Sales are usually advertised in newspapers, including the *International Herald Tribune*. Hard times have moved the seasons ahead, so nowadays anything goes.

Some deluxe brands have special sale events once or twice a year, such as the Hermès sales in October and March, when people line up for hours before the store opens.

SOULEIADO The south of France is known for a specific type of cotton fabric that is printed in bright colors with swirls of paisley, flowers, and arabesques. The designs are created with wood blocks using the same style of fabric printing that has been done in India for centuries.

These fabrics originally entered France through the port of Marseille, hence their association with the south of France, where they became known as *tissus Indiennes* or even *tissus Nîmes,* Nîmes being another major textile center in the south (and the home of denim—de Nîmes).

The fabric has been made locally for centuries, but Charles Démery, a craftsman who began a fabric firm known as Souleiado, revived it in Provence in the late 1930s. Souleiado became popular in the United States in the 1980s through a firm called Pierre Deux, which at that time carried exclusive rights to sell Souleiado in America. Souleiado recently went bankrupt, but was bought and reorganized. Pierre Deux stores in the United States now carry the Les Olivades brand.

Of all the many firms making *tissus Indiennes,* Souleiado has the highest quality of screens and fabric and by far the highest prices.

STAR A word with many meanings in French and in Franglish: If it's a star in the sky, it's *l'etoile;* if it's the place in Paris where the Arc de Triomphe is located, it's *L'Etoile;* if it's a movie star, even a French one, he or she is a star (so *les stars* hang out in Cannes for the Film Festival). When a foodie refers to a chef and his stars, he is referring to the chef's *Michelin Guide* ranking.

SVP This is an abbreviation for *s'il vous plait* (please), used frequently in print advertisements and directions.

TABAC This is a tobacco shop where newspapers, magazines, cigarettes, gum, and the essentials of life are sold, including stamps and phone cards. It's also where you pay parking tickets.

TAMTAM This is the French version of a pager.

TAPENADE This is a specialty food item from the south of France, where olives are the mainstay of life. Tapenade is essentially a spread made from mashed-up olives with a few spices, some olive oil, and other ingredients—some makers chop up an anchovy or two into the mix. The combination of spices used and the texture of the mashing make for the variety of styles. Olives have quite a piquant taste, and tapenade is very full bodied. Each maker prepares tapenade differently, so you can taste your way across the south of France.

You can buy tapenade in jars in most markets in the south of France. Surprisingly, Brand X from the guy at the market in Nice is no more or less expensive than the version Roger Vergé sells in his boutique in Mougins. The going price for a small jar is usually about 4.35€ ($5).

TELECARTE This is an electronic phone card that not only makes calling home, or calling anywhere, an affordable breeze, but also leaves you with a collectible.

You can buy phone cards at any *tabac* or news kiosk. The smallest denomination is 6€ ($6.90) for 50 units. This will go surprisingly far, especially if you are calling within France. If you plan to call the United States, you should buy a card with

a large number of units as soon as you arrive. The more units to the card, the more savings.

Although you can still find telephones that use a *pièce* (coin), they are more popular in the boonies than in big cities.

Here's how you use a *télécarte:*

- Locate a modern-looking phone booth or one that has a horizontal slot in it for the phone card.
- Lift the phone off the receiver and insert the *télécarte.*
- Read the computer display on the phone, which gives instructions in French. Don't read French? Not to worry. Anyone can figure this out. For example, "please wait" is written *"patience, svp."* Easy as *un, deux, trois!* And you didn't know you spoke French.
- The units will click away electronically and visually. When you are down to the last few units, a beeping noise ensues. Time to say *au revoir.*

TGV TGV stands for *Train à Grande Vitesse,* if you insist on knowing. As far as I'm concerned, it's Trains-R-Great-4-Vous. TGV is one of the oldest high-speed train networks in the world; its trains go up to about 300kmph (186 mph). More and more TGV track is laid each year, so you can get to more and more regions of France quickly.

THALASSOTHERAPIE The French, who are great believers in spa treatments for improving or maintaining health, have recently gone bonkers over *thalassotherapie,* which means spa treatments related to seawater. Major spas are located on the French Atlantic coast, although Prince Rainier in Monte Carlo has recently opened a spa there to capitalize on the trend and to make his life easier—now he doesn't have to travel out of town to get treatments.

A key part of the treatments involves soaking in seawater or seaweed-enhanced bathwater, the theory being that seaweed will rebalance the impurities in your body. For proper treatment, your soak should be at body temperature, to encourage

osmosis. This is rather cool—a nice hot bath is traditionally 103° to 106°F (39°C–41°C), not a lowly 98.6°F (37°C). So don't be shocked if you're asked to pay 35€ ($40) to sit in a cold bath of smelly brown water for a mere 15 minutes.

TIRE-BOUCHON This is a corkscrew. You'd be surprised how many styles there are; corkscrews are a serious collectible.

TISSUS INDIENNES French Provençal-style fabrics (see "Souleiado," above).

TRAVERSIN How adorable: Your traditional French bed has a *traversin* (bolster) and you and your loved one are about to count *moutons* (sheep) and count your blessings for having found such a cute little French inn. But you need to know that the bolster does not move and is not adjustable. Call for pillows before you try to make it through the night.

USINE A *usine* is a factory. *Magasins d'usine* are factory-outlet shops.

As in every other part of the world, there are real factory shops and fake factory shops. Watch out for some of those factory-direct perfume shops in the south of France. Even some of the real factory shops, such as the Souleiado shop in Tarascon, offer no bargains.

But wait: There is a new trend in France toward American-style outlet malls. The city of Troyes, about an hour from Paris, has been the outlet capital of the country since the early 1990s. There's also a really chic and jazzy outlet mall called La Vallée, located just outside Paris next to Disneyland (p. 3).

Paris is dotted with factory-direct stores that sell old stock, much of it from big names such as Cacharel and Sonia Rykiel. Note the use of the word *stock* in the names of such shops.

VO Movies with the original voice (VO) have subtitles in French. You can see any American or British flick in a French theater and not only understand the whole thing but also teach yourself French while reading the subtitles. VO movies are most common in the big movie theaters along the Champs-Elysées in Paris, but they play elsewhere as well.

WINE If you say no to wine, you say no to France. If you think I'm going to go beyond that, you're nuts. There are books and books and books about all this. Study them; subscribe to the mags.

In the United States, call © **800/522-WINE** for a free booklet on French wine and wineries that are open to visitors. Or check out the website: **www.frenchwinesfood.com**.

GUIDE TO BOUTIQUES & CHAINS

What follows is a sampling of some of the big names in French retail. Some are well-known designers, while others are multiples (chain stores) with numerous branches all over France.

AGATHA Whimsical costume jewelry at moderate prices. Some stores are found in the United States.

AGNES B Upscale casual wear for men and women, often in separate shops. Hip, but not too *outré*.

BLANC BLEU BCBG looks with a nautical edge and a Ralph Lauren feel; excellent quality and status for those in the know. Men's, women's, and children's lines.

CAMIEU Cheapie version of Sweden's H&M for inexpensive fashions; worth a look, especially for teens and tweens.

CARRE BLANC For bed and tabletop. It's a good source for duvet covers, which are hard to find in abundance in the United States.

CHACOK Status design firm known for bright colors, ethnic inspiration, lots of knits for winter, and floating cotton for summer. It also has sensational looks for the south of France, where dash and flair really count. Prices are equal to those of American designer bridge lines.

CHIPIE Chipie carries blue jeans and casual clothes with French chic.

COMTESSE DU BARRY This large chain of gourmet food stores carries packaged goods with the house label.

DESCAMPS These stores carry bed linens, bathrobes, great baby gifts, and a wonderful line of scented rocks. Its freestanding stores were closed in the United States, but it's alive and quite well all over France.

FLORIANE Expensive, but adorable, kiddie clothes. Young and hip meets traditional.

FNAC This chain of book and music stores is a great place to meet young people. It has slightly better prices than regular record shops as well as a huge selection. It also sells tickets to events.

GENEVIEVE LETHU This Provençal designer has hundreds of tabletop boutiques all over the country as well as a few outside France. The colors are great and the style vibrant and contemporary, while still a little traditional.

HABITAT/THE CONRAN SHOP These are two totally different firms, although each was begun by Sir Terrence Conran, and they sell very similar goods: items with country flair and clean contemporary lines for the home. As impossible as this seems, the designs are at the same time very French and very English. Habitat is a major multiple located throughout France. The Conran Shop is only in Paris.

LACOSTE The world's most knocked-off alligator (called *le crocodile* in France) is alive and well and living in France in major department stores and freestanding boutiques. Here's the catch: The goods are often less expensive in the United States. But there are styles in France that are not exported to the U.S.

MARINA RINALDI This is an Italian brand of large-size fashions from Max Mara, sold throughout France in freestanding stores and in Max Mara boutiques. It's the leading line of European plus-size fashion.

MONOPRIX This chain of dime stores, owned by Galeries Lafayette, is a great place to shop for affordable everything. Many of these stores have grocery stores attached. There is a branch of Monoprix in almost every French city; be sure to check out the ones in fancy suburbs and good neighborhoods—they have the best supply of chic for the price.

PIMKIE For cheapie teenage fashions with cutting-edge style, look no further.

REDOUTE This major catalog company, sort of like JCPenney, has now also opened its own retail shops.

REPETTO This traditional ballet house is known for first introducing ballet slippers into mainstream fashion. It now makes slippers (and mocs) in a variety of colors and skins.

SEPHORA This chain sells all kinds of makeup and fragrance brands, as well as some hair accessories, its own line of bath products, and every other beauty treatment you can imagine.

TROIS SUISSES This is a major catalog company that basically sells cheap clothes, but guest designers make seasonal offerings. It even offers Vivienne Westwood.

Chapter Four

SHOPPING PARIS

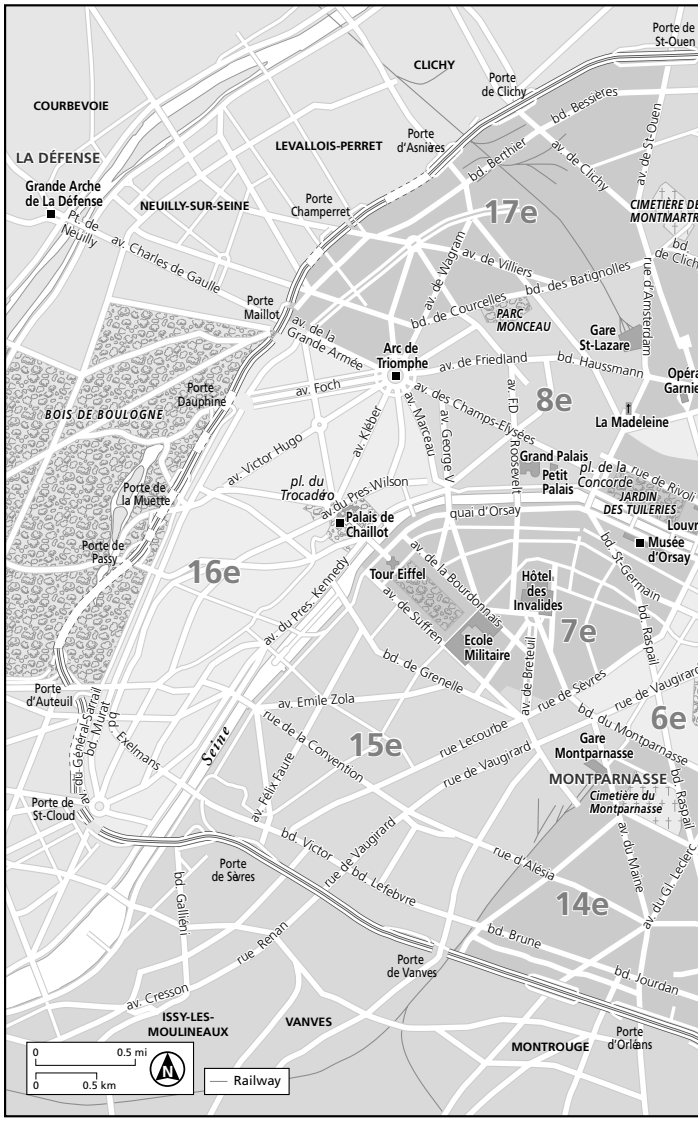
WELCOME TO PARIS

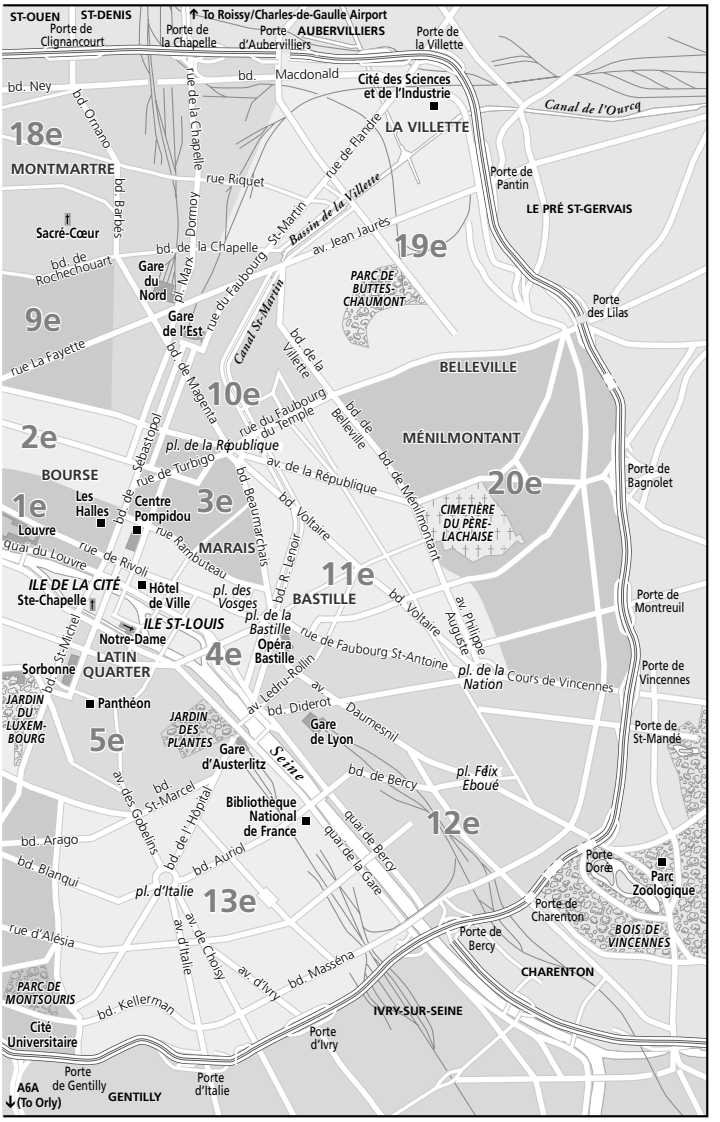
When you leaf through French magazines, you'll notice that in ads, the addresses for branch stores are written as "Paris" and "provinces." Not *Provence;* that's *provinces.* You see, even to the French, it's very simple: There's Paris, and there's the rest of France. Even to the French, if you're not in Paris, you're in the provinces.

Paris is indeed the City of Light. It is the beginning and the end of a certain kind of light. For a shopper, Paris means serious shopping. There is no comparison between the energy—yes, even shopping energy—that vibrates off the streets of Paris and what goes on in the countryside. Maybe that's my point: Paris is about energy, whereas the countryside is about the luxuries of time, space, sunflowers, wine, slow meals, and slow shopping.

The provinces are also less expensive than Paris. At a time when the dollar isn't as strong as it used to be, prices count. You may want to use your time in Paris for a special meal, a memorable experience, or a neighborhood that just makes your soul smile. Sometimes the kind of shopping you do in Paris isn't to buy things—it's to gain insight.

Paris at a Glance




ST-OUEN
ST-DENIS
Porte de Clignancourt
Porte de la Chapelle
To Roissy/Charles-de-Gaulle Airport
Porte d'Aubervilliers
AUBERVILLIERS
Porte de la Villette
bd. Ney
bd. Ornano
rue de la Chapelle
bd. Macdonald
Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie
Canal de l'Ourcq
18e
MONTMARTRE
LA VILLETTE
rue Riquet
rue de Flandre
Bassin de la Villette
Porte de Pantin
LE PRÉ ST-GERVAIS
bd. Barbès
Sacré-Cœur
bd. de la Chapelle
St-Martin
av. Jean Jaurès
19e
bd. de Rochechouart
Gare du Nord
pl. Marx Dormoy
rue du Faubourg
PARC DE BUTTES-CHAUMONT
Porte des Lilas
9e
Gare de l'Est
Canal St-Martin
rue La Fayette
bd. de Magenta
bd. de la Villette
BELLEVILLE
10e
rue du Faubourg du Temple
bd. de Belleville
2e
pl. de la République
MÉNILMONTANT
rue de Turbigo
av. de la République
bd. de Ménilmontant
Porte de Bagnolet
BOURSE
bd. Sébastopol
bd. Beaumarchais
20e
1e
Les Halles
Centre Pompidou
3e
bd. Voltaire
CIMETIÈRE DU PÈRE-LACHAISE
Louvre
rue Rambuteau
MARAIS
quai du Louvre
rue de Rivoli
11e
ILE DE LA CITÉ
Hôtel de Ville
pl. des Vosges
BASTILLE
Porte de Montreuil
Ste-Chapelle
ILE ST-LOUIS
pl. de la Bastille
bd. Voltaire
av. Philippe Auguste
Notre-Dame
Opéra Bastille
rue de Faubourg St-Antoine
Porte de Vincennes
LATIN QUARTER
4e
pl. de la Nation
Cours de Vincennes
Sorbonne
av. Ledru-Rollin
av. Daumesnil
JARDIN DU LUXEM-BOURG
Panthéon
bd. Diderot
Gare de Lyon
Porte de St-Mandé
JARDIN DES PLANTES
5e
Gare d'Austerlitz
Seine
pl. Félix Eboué
bd. de Bercy
av. des Gobelins
bd. St-Marcel
Bibliothèque National de France
12e
bd. de l'Hôpital
quai de Bercy
bd. Arago
bd. Auriol
quai de la Gare
Porte Dorée
Parc Zoologique
bd. Blanqui
pl. d'Italie
13e
Porte de Charenton
av. de Choisy
av. d'Italie
BOIS DE VINCENNES
rue d'Alésia
Porte de Bercy
av. d'Ivry
bd. Masséna
CHARENTON
PARC DE MONTSOURIS
bd. Kellerman
IVRY-SUR-SEINE
Cité Universitaire
Porte d'Ivry
Porte de Gentilly
Porte d'Italie
A6A
(To Orly)
GENTILLY

Planning Paris

Shoppers don't need to come to Paris at all—but if you are planning to include Paris on your trip and aren't certain of the details, hear me out.

Paris represents intense shopping. Note that it's only after you've been through France and done the country bit that you'll know what you still need for your at-home use or for your own psychic rewards. It's also silly to shop in Paris first and fill your suitcases with items that you will then have to schlep in and out of a series of hotels.

If you don't know Paris well, the number of shopping services available can be downright overwhelming; so rather than getting a headache and heart palpitations or making a shopping boo-boo, seek Paris as a last resort—in all senses of the word. Paris is different from all the rest of France—and although you can buy many of the same things in other parts of France, there's only one Paris, and that's why it's Paris.

The Lay of the Land

Paris is composed of 20 *arrondissements* (districts; see the map on p. 58). The name of the arrondissement is usually included in an address, either as simply the arrondissement number (for example, 1er, 17e) or as part of the zip code (for example, 75001 equals 1er, 75017 equals 17e).

Born to Shop Paris

If you're going to be in Paris for more than a day, I suggest that you check out *Born to Shop Paris,* as the book you are holding was created specifically for those who have only a day to shop in Paris, or possibly even just a few hours.

This chapter gives an overview of Paris and some ideas on how to best use the small amount of time you have here. It is by no means comprehensive.

Part of your job in selecting a hotel for a short stay is to study the lay of the land and get nestled into an arrondissement that will serve as many of your needs as possible, so you don't have to schlep all over in a mad dash.

Also make sure you have good Métro connections, as that will be your best way of getting around—and shopping around. You will be less tempted to take taxis if you have good public transportation—and every taxi fare saved is another gift bought.

Getting Around Paris

Paris is a great city for walking. You can spend your days staring at the architecture, the stores, and the people. If you want a quicker method of transportation, you can use the Métro, which connects every part of town and costs 1.30€ ($1.50) per ride. To save money and time, buy a *carnet,* a book of 10 tickets for 10€ ($12). These tickets can be used on both the bus and the Métro. If you're in Paris for just a day, you may want a 1-day card; or perhaps you have chosen your hotel and shopping goals so that everything is at hand.

Taxis are expensive (flag drops at 2€/$2.30) and often have surcharges for luggage, extra passengers, and so on. Please note that it is against the law for a taxi sedan to carry five adults. Therefore, if you are a group of four people and one of you does not drive a taxi, you may need to call **TaxisG7** (✆ **01-41-27-66-67**), which operates special vans. If you call a taxi, the meter drops the minute they accept your address.

If you need a private driving service (with vans) for groups or for airport transportation, try **Paris Millénium** (✆ **01-30-71-93-03;** parismillenium@wanadoo.fr). This is my regular service; the drivers speak English and will help you with luggage or the details, and even with reservations and touring information. This company also rents by the hour for a drive around Paris or for day trips.

SLEEPING IN PARIS

The Palace Hotels

Hotels in France are rated from one to four stars. Thus there are no five-star hotels, but there are four-star deluxe hotels (written *****D*), which are classified in the French manner as "palace hotels."

FOUR SEASONS GEORGE V

31 av. George V, 8e (Métro: George V).

This hotel is all about style and location and customers who can't get enough—the flowers have become one of the latest sights to see in Paris, so much so that even those who aren't staying here come by to gawk. Many rooms have Eiffel Tower views; the spa-cum-pool is luxury itself; the chef has three stars; and the shopping location is excellent, especially for upmarket goods.

Although rack rates start at over 600€ ($690), promotional deals can be available—especially out of season. Some include a spa treatment; others provide dinner in the famous restaurant Le Cinq. For reservations in the U.S., call ✆ **800/332-3442.** Local phone ✆ 01-49-52-70-00. Fax 01-49-52-70-10. www.fourseasons.com.

HOTEL DE CRILLON

10 place de la Concorde, 8e (Métro: Concorde).

Located at the base of the Champs-Elysées, the Crillon is an old-fashioned mansion with a low-key luxury lobby where even Madonna feels at home (no autographs, please). It boasts the first Guerlain spa located in a hotel, it has a fancy gym for guests, and it has redone all rooms—even the dining room (where it recently poached one of the most famous chefs in town). The location is sublime—just a block from Hermès and the other big names on the rue du Faubourg St-Honoré.

Rates start at 600€ ($690), but can vary with promotions (for example, a free fourth night when you pay for the first 3 nights). Book in the U.S. through Leading Hotels of the World (✆ **800/233-6800**). Local phone ✆ 01-44-71-15-00. www.lhw.com/decrillon.

Hotel Meurice

228 rue de Rivoli, 1er (Métro: Tuilleries or Concorde).

Forget anything you may remember of the old Meurice. The hotel has undergone an enormous renovation to welcome it to the Dorchester Group, and is now fancier than the Ritz. Talk about a gilt trip: It's got a two-star chef, one of the best shopping locations in town, and even various promotional deals. Check out the bar scene, where you'll see me sipping a cocktail called a Meurice Millennium. This is certainly the place for those who want as much old-fashioned glamour as they can stand.

Official rack rates are over 600€ ($690), but ask about special deals. Leading Hotels of the World has promotions offering one free night; call ✆ **800/223-6800.** Local phone ✆ 01-44-58-10-10. www.meuricehotel.com.

Good Finds

Concorde St-Lazare

108 rue St-Lazare, 8e (Métro: St-Lazare).

The lobby is drop-dead gorgeous, historical, and protected by French law, and it's also in a well-priced hotel with the best location for shoppers. It's particularly great for those who are in town for just a day or two, as everything you really need is within 5 minutes.

There are all sorts of good rates, but expect to pay about 280€ ($320) with a promotional deal. In the U.S., call ✆ **800/888-4747.** Local phone ✆ 01-40-08-44-44. Fax 01-42-93-01-20. www.concordestlazare-paris.com.

Le Walt

37 av. de la Motte Picquet, 7e (Métro: Motte Picquet).

I consider this hotel one of my greatest finds: It's chic, has a wonderful location, and isn't too expensive. It also offers its own shopping promotion that includes a limo ride to an outlet mall. Le Walt is located on the Left Bank in a neighborhood that feels residential, not touristy; but it's still just a few meters from the famous food markets of rue Cler. The Métro stop is right out the front door; there's also several good bus lines.

The hotel has only 25 rooms, and yes, those rooms are a bit small . . . as are all hotel rooms on the Left Bank. Nonetheless, they're gorgeous and outfitted with all the modern luxuries you'd expect—two phone lines, modem, cable TV, and so on. The backdrop to each bed is a hand-painted copy of a masterpiece, so you'll feel like you're sleeping in a museum while spending less than 300€ ($345) per night.

Note: If you can't get into Le Walt, ask about Le Marquis, in the 15e, which is owned by the same family. The feeling of that neighborhood is different; I prefer to send you to the 7e. Local phone ✆ **01-45-51-55-83.** www.inwoodhotel.com.

Plaza Paris Vendome

4 rue du Mont Thabor, 1er (Métro: Tuileries).

If you crave fancy but don't want to spend 600€ ($690) per night, check out this hotel, which is right behind the Meurice and offers a different kind of luxe at closer to 300€ ($345) per night. There's a pool and health club, a restaurant founded by a multi-star chef, and 99 rooms done in neutral moderne flourishes that will cushion you from the real world. Local phone ✆ **01-40-20-20-00.** www.plazaparisvendome.com.

SHOPPING HOURS

You're in the big city now, so forget everything you might know about provincial shopping hours. In Paris, shopping hours

are usually 10am to 7pm. Some big stores stay open until 9pm or even 10pm. Most stores are open during the lunch hour; all big stores are open on Monday mornings.

The large department stores tend to open at 9:30am, while the dime stores (such as Monoprix) open at 8:45 or 9am, depending on the time of the year. Gourmet Lafayette is open until 9pm, as are some of the other dime stores. The Monoprix on the Champs-Elysées is open until 10pm in winter and until midnight in summer.

Sundays aren't dead in Paris. They never really were, thanks to the flea markets and antiques business, but now more and more districts' stores are fighting government regulations about Sunday openings. Currently, in order to open on Sunday, an area must be designated a tourist zone—both the Marais and the Champs-Elysées are designated thus. Flea markets and antiques "villages" are also allowed to open on Sunday. Museums and their gift shops can open on Sundays; the mall in the Louvre is hopping on Sunday, as is La Vallée, the outlet mall near Disneyland Paris (p. 3).

There are also "exceptional openings." By French law, stores can be open five Sundays a year. So each store picks its five most valuable Sundays, which are usually before Christmas. Some stores do an opening on Easter Sunday or Mother's Day or even the first day of the sales.

SNACKING & SHOPPING

For those in search of a light meal that's convenient to shopping yet not too expensive or time-consuming, here are a few ideas:

- All the big department stores have restaurants, cafes, or take-out food—try the new **Lafayette Maison.**
- Many specialty stores now have restaurants—from **Armani Caffé** to **Etam** to **Colette.** All of these choices offer a chic crowd and good eats. Even though Etam is a mass-market

store, the food is good and the cafe is a delight. Try the flavored iced tea with lunch.

- **Paul** is a national chain of bread shops that originated in Lille and is expanding like mad all over Paris. There is even one on boulevard de la Opéra, right across from the new **Starbucks.**
- **Toastissimo** is a chain of fast-food eateries that serve *panini* (toasted Italian sandwiches) and salads; there's one just about everywhere, particularly in the 1er and 8e.
- **Oliviers & Co.** is a chain of gourmet olive-oil shops located all over France; some of the stores now have small restaurants. There's one in Paris on the rue des Levis, 17e (Métro: Villiers).
- Food palaces and gourmet grocery stores have restaurants and snack bars right inside them—try **Fauchon, Hédiard, Lafayette Gourmet,** and **La Grande Epicerie,** which is part of Le Bon Marché.
- Museum cafes are being upgraded to an art form. **Georges** (Pompidou Center) is the fanciest of the lot. Others are less well known, such as the cafes at the **Musée Jacquemart-Andrée** and **Gare d'Orsay,** which are both so wonderful that you will dine out on the decor for days.

SHOPPING STRATEGIES

- Organize your day way before you even get to Paris. Have a map and a plan of attack if you want to cram a lot of specifics into one day.
- If spending 175€ ($201) takes some doing on your part but you want to take advantage of the tax refund *(détaxe)* in France, plan ahead of time where you think you're most likely to spend that kind of money and get the refund. Then allow time for the paperwork.
- Consider doing all your shopping within one department store so that your total purchases meet the minimum required for the *détaxe* refund. Don't buy a little here and a little there

if you think you can save money by using a strategy. Remember, you must spend the 175€ ($201) in the same store on the same day to get the refund.

- Note that real life in Paris is expensive. You'll do best if you splurge on one fabulous something or limit yourself to small gifts, food items, and souvenirs in the $5-to-$10 range.
- If you plan to shop in any of the big department stores, try to get there around 10am or earlier, when they open. By noon, they are very crowded.
- When you shop in small stores, remember your French manners; see "How to Be French," in chapter 3.
- Consider making one big haul of the same item as gifts for everyone, or stocking up on gifts for use throughout the year once you're back at home. With luck, you'll buy enough to qualify for *détaxe*. I do this with candles from L'Occitane, Diptyque, or Mariage Frères. French luxury candles are not cheap, so buy one that lasts a long time (the burn time is listed on the package) and represents a status brand; you'll pay at least 30€ ($35) for the aforementioned brands.
- Wear comfortable shoes and a handbag that can either fit across your body or be worn under your coat. Paris is no more dangerous than any other big city, but when you're jumping on and off the Métro and bustling around, you want to make sure you aren't an easy target.
- If you plan to try on clothes, wear something that is easy to get in and out of.
- As you plan your day, figure out where you want to end up for lunch. If your time is limited, your shopping will be much more successful if it's planned properly. Even if you just want fast food, know which neighborhood to hit at lunchtime and the type of meal that will best fulfill your fantasies. Also plan a proper tea or coffee break for around 4pm. You might also want to work in a drop-off point to get rid of your packages.
- If time is truly a worry, consider splurging on professional help for a day. Some shopping services take you out and about

with car and driver. Paris traffic can be terrible, but you won't have to do any thinking or read any maps on your own. ***Note:*** Don't go to a flea market in a limo.

- Keep receipts to declare your goods when you return home. Don't try to run anything past U.S. Customs officers; nothing screams out like a new handbag or a pair of *ooh la la* shoes.
- Allow at least a half-hour at the airport for reclaiming your tax refund if you're leaving the European Union from Paris. (If it's the height of the summer season, allow 1 hr.) If you're going on to another country in the E.U., no sweat—you claim your refund only as you depart the E.U. for good.

ONLY ONE HOUR IN PARIS?

If you have only an hour to shop, you might want to try a place like the flagship **Galeries Lafayette,** as it has everything you can imagine (and then some). **Au Printemps,** the neighboring department store, is smaller than Galeries, although beauty and home style are in one building and fashion is in another (Métro: Havre-Caumartin or Chaussée-d'Antin).

If, however, you have the kind of nerves that fray in crowds or under pressure, spend your hour somewhere peaceful—like a museum shop (try the store attached to **Musée des Arts Décoratifs,** 109 rue de Rivoli; Métro: Louvre or Palais Royal) or even the stores in the galleries that surround the Palais Royal. You won't find lots of cheap gifts at the Palais Royal, but you will glimpse a hidden part of Paris and feel what it's like to have shopping in your soul. You can also fit in a stop at the gift shop at **La Comedie Francaise,** which does have classy souvenir gifts; it's right in front of the Palais Royal Métro station in the outside arcade.

Personally, if I had just an hour, I'd take the Métro to Sèvres-Babylone and spend my time at the grocery store that's part of Le Bon Marché, **La Grande Epicerie.** Foodstuffs make great inexpensive gifts, and I swoon for food dreams. With any

leftover time, I'd walk up the adjacent rue St-Placide, where there are a few discount shops (try **Vidna,** 9 rue St-Placide, for discounts on the Nitya brand) and a fabulous Arts-and-Crafts store called **Crea,** at 55 rue St-Placide. To make this a total hat trick, I'd lunch at **Delicabar,** a wildly inventive restaurant upstairs from L'Epicerie. You'll be telling the folks at home about it for days.

BEST SHOPPING NEIGHBORHOODS

Because you're on a tear, I've listed below the best streets and neighborhoods for finding a lot of stuff, the new and hot stores, and the unusual items on offer.

Street of Brands

Most of the stars of international design have shops on the **rue du Faubourg St-Honoré.** This is a strolling and window-shopping street with a few affordable options as well as many of the world's fanciest art galleries, antiques shops, and designer flagships. (Start at the Concorde Métro station and walk west.)

While new stores do keep opening up, and this remains an important shopping area because of its image, it might not be on your must-do list unless you're really into big-time labels such as **Gucci** (no. 2), **Hermès** (no. 24), **Versace** (no. 62), and **Sonia Rykiel** (no. 70). Perhaps all you can afford to do on this street of dreams is eat a burger. If so, check out **Café Bleu,** inside the **Lanvin** men's store (no. 15).

Note, however, that this street connects magnificently to other, more realistic shopping spots. It's only 2 blocks from department-store heaven (see below), 1 block from place Vendôme (more fancier-than-thou shops), 2 blocks from the Opéra, and just down the street from a marvelous and relatively inexpensive shopping street, **rue St-Honoré,** which is an extension of rue du Faubourg St-Honoré.

So don't necessarily get hung up on the hype that accompanies the name Faubourg St-Honoré. I'm big on the adjacent

area, including the rue Royale, which leads to place de la Madeleine, rue St-Honoré, rue de Castiglione, and great stores with great addresses that aren't directly on the Faubourg. Incidentally, several new shops have opened at place de la Madeleine on the avenue des Malsherbes side of this area (Métro: Madeleine).

Best Fancy Shopping Street

For the world's biggest names and fanciest digs, get a look at **avenue Montaigne.** (Take the Métro to Alma Marceau; then walk east.) You'll pass every big name from **Bulgari** (no. 27) to **Ungaro** (no. 2). Hmmm, make that **Valentino** (no. 17) and **Vuitton** (no. 22), with **Dior** (no. 30) and **Max Mara** (no. 31) thrown in for good fun. Oh, and don't forget **Emilio Pucci** (no. 36) and **Celine** (no. 38). Eat an affordable but ever-so-chic lunch at the cafe inside **Joseph** (no. 14). If you're loaded with euros and want something to remember for the rest of your life, lunch in the courtyard at the **Hotel Plaza Athénée** (no. 25), where you'll dine on custom-made Porthault linen, replete with red geraniums. There's more shopping, of course. **Porthault** (no. 18) is right across the street, so you can buy your own $1,000 linens . . . and then there's **Chanel** (no. 42), which has expanded and also added an **Eres** shop.

Best Born-Again Shopping Street

I used to detest the **Champs-Elysées,** but I am finally impressed. (Métro: Ch.-de-Gaulle Etoile to start at the top of the Champs-Elysées.) Now you'll find the **Louis Vuitton/Marc Jacobs** (no. 101) stuff at an LV temple to retail, an **FNAC** (no. 74) to compete with **Virgin Megastore,** the tea salon **Ladurée** (no. 75) for a snack, and **Sephora** (no. 70–72) for perfumes and beauty aids. Touch base with the new Paris at **Le Drugstore** (no. 131), with its bookstore, boutiques, pharmacy, news kiosk, fantasy toilets, and brasserie with Alain Ducasse menu—and all this open on Sundays. You'll come across many other branch stores, from **Lacoste** to **Gap** and the **Disney Store** (oy) and also

a good **Monoprix** (yay) . . . and at the far end, a new **Cartier** (no. 154). You may not be in the market for a car, but the auto showrooms are a treat, and some have art galleries and even restaurants inside. Most of the movie theaters in this area have English voice tracks.

Best of the Left Bank

To the tourist, the heart of the Left Bank is the area surrounding **St-Germain-des-Prés.** Obvious designer stores are on the boulevard, but the back streets in this area are sublime. Various nooks and crannies of the neighborhood are devoted to shoes or fabrics or antiques. The best little streets are rue Dragon, rue Cherche Midi, rue de Seine, rue de Buci, rue Jacob, and the tiny place de Furstemburg. To see, and feel, the spirit of the Left Bank, you must leave the boulevard St-Germain and get medieval. Don't miss **place St-Sulpice!** (Métro: St-Germain-des-Près.)

Best of the Marais

Hidden away in an almost medieval part of Paris, the Marais features a large square surrounded by an arcade of stores and a series of small back streets. This area is home to a lot of the funky designer shops that are the backbone of Paris style. Many of the stores in the Marais are open on Sunday.

Outside the Marais, but only 2 blocks away, is the **Village St-Paul** (rue St-Paul), a small antiques district between the Marais and the Seine. The 50 stores here are open on Sunday.

In the other direction from the river, back toward the small streets, is the **Picasso Museum.** As you make your way, you'll pass more and more tiny shops featuring the latest cutting-edge ideas in fashion. (Métro: St-Paul.)

Best of the Louvre/Rue de Rivoli

The back end of the Louvre stretches along the rue de Rivoli for several blocks. Inside there may be art treasures, but outside there are stores. In fact, there are even stores underneath.

Check out **Carrousel du Louvre,** an American-style shopping-mall. It has a food court on the mezzanine level and is attached to the Louvre through a gallery lined with museum gift shops and a row of stores, including **Sephora, Lalique,** and **Virgin Megastore.** Everything is open on Sunday, so if you need a shopping fix when Paris seems closed, this is the place.

Across the street is a building filled with antiques dealers, **Le Louvre des Antiquaires.** One block over is the **Palais Royal,** which has a hidden garden filled with arcades of tiny, wonderful shops. This is one of my favorite spots in all of Paris. Don't miss **Shiseido,** if only to gawk; it's a gorgeous makeup and perfume shop. A few doors away is **Le Prince Jardinier,** which is no ordinary garden shop.

Meanwhile, the 2-block parade along rue de Rivoli across from the museum is door-to-door tourist traps (TTs), selling every imaginable T-shirt, ashtray, and lighter, plus a few perfume and scarf shops. One block away, discreetly tucked behind that gold statue of Joan of Arc, is a **Monoprix.**

Don't miss the opportunity to eat lunch at **Café Marly,** which faces the courtyard of the Louvre—what a crowd. (Métro: Palais-Royal or Louvre-Rivoli.)

Best Department-Store Street

This could be department-store heaven or hell, depending on the time of year and how you feel about crowds. The two most famous *grands magasins* (large department stores) in Paris, **Galeries Lafayette** (no. 40) and **Au Printemps** (no. 64), are side by side on the boulevard Haussmann, in the 9e. If you're in a hurry, you might find that visiting a department store is the answer to all your prayers. These places are huge, carry a little of everything, and offer a flat 10% discount to foreigners (pick up free vouchers at the store's information desk), plus a *détaxe* refund if your purchases qualify.

The snazziest store to hit Paris in decades is **Lafayette Maison,** the home-style branch of Galeries Lafayette. Meanwhile, Galeries Lafayette's men's store houses **Lafayette**

Gourmet, a fancy grocery store with a new wine shop and two restaurants.

Au Printemps has three parts: Printemps Maison (my favorite), Printemps Mode, and Brummel, which is also called Printemps Homme (the men's store). Part of the so-called home store was just renovated and has a rich panoply of luxury brands. There is also a knock-your-socks-off two-level beauty department.

On the curb in front of these stores are stalls and hawkers, selling promotional merchandise from inside the stores. Buy a crepe and munch and stare. (Métro: Havre-Caumartin.)

Best Weird, Little-Known Shopping Destination

Get on the new no. 14 Métro line and hop off at Cour St-Emilion to get to Bercy Village, a rather American-style shopping-mall experience created out of a series of wine warehouses in the 12e. The stores are interesting, but it's the ambience of the whole place and the no. 14 that make the trip worthwhile—not the actual stores. Come to think of it, the stores aren't bad, either. You'll find Sephora's White Store, of which there are only a handful in the world; Résonances, a gift shop (it has also opened up at place de la Madeleine); a very cute Club Med vacation store; and Truffaut, a gardening and flower store. There are also cafes and bars and snack places, so you sit outside and stare at the fun young crowd.

Runner-Up

A runner-up in this category, giving you an option that's easier to get to (Bercy Village is sort of out there) is **Marché Saint Honoré,** a small square off the rue St-Honoré, 1er. Now, remember that I said rue St-Honoré, *not* Faubourg St-Honoré; we're talking around the corner from the Meurice. The highlight, retail-wise, is the **Castelbajac Concept Store,** but there's some awfully interesting architecture in the square itself, as well as a Belgian baker, **Le Pain Quotidien,** that makes a great stop

for a snack, brunch, or lunch. You'll also find a few hidden discount stores and all sorts of stuff that you would not see if you weren't looking. This district is a mere sneeze from a main tourist street, yet remains enough off the beaten path to avoid feeling touristy. (Métro: Tuileries.)

NEWSMAKERS

Best New Department Store

LAFAYETTE MAISON
35 bd. Haussmann, 9e (Métro: Havre-Caumartin or St-Lazare).

Galeries Lafayette has its flagship store, and then it has the men's store next door, with a gourmet grocery store upstairs from that. Now it has opened the first new department store in Paris in 35 years—and *ooh la la!* Of the five floors, the best are the ground level (get takeout food here) and the basement (look for cooking demonstrations). The entire place is all modern, with tiny beams of electric lights blinking out the names of brands in graffiti style. The ground floor looks a bit like a fancy Target (heaps of colorful merchandise), but Paris has not seen this much energy since the French Revolution.

Best New Concept Store

LE DRUGSTORE
131 av. des Champs-Elysées, 8e (Métro: Ch.-de-Gaulle Etoile).

The street level is far, far better than the lower level, and the ladies' room is perhaps best of all, but this store stays open on Sunday, borrows its origins from Colette and some U.S. marketing ideas, and offers a lot of energy, a great crowd, and the usual suspects in terms of design and artsy objects—plus a wine shop, a great news kiosk, a small food section, and, of course, the pharmacy.

Runner-Up

Le Carre des Simples
22 rue Tronchet, 8e (Métro: St-Lazare or Madeleine).

Medicinal plants, forgotten cures, secrets of the ages, essential oils—you name it, it's here. The location is easy to get to and near the major department stores.

Best New Ethnic

Shanghai Tang
76 rue Bonaparte (Métro: St-Sulpice).

Shanghai Tang is not a new brand, nor is the Maison la Chine new to Paris or the place St-Sulpice . . . but the store's arrival has brought a blast of fresh air and a whole new way of looking at things, of adding Zen to your French attitude.

Best New Makeup/Beauty Store

Au Printemps
64 bd. Haussmann, 9e (Métro: Havre-Caumartin).

This department store has totally redone its beauty floors to add not only drop-dead chic, but also wide aisles and lots of play space—you can try all sorts of makeup. There's also a *parapharmacie* (large discount drugstores) and a slew of brands not found elsewhere. Don't forget to ask at the information desk for your tourist discount card.

Best Shoe News

This is a doubleheader, as the designer is the same man working under two different labels. The '60s iconic brand **Roger Vivier** has come back to life with a new store at 29 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, 8e (Métro: Concorde). The man designing the shoes is named **Bruno Frisoni,** who has also opened his own shop at 34 rue de Grenelle, 7e (Métro: Ecole Militaire). Fans of sensible footwear need not apply.

Meanwhile, the **Charles Jourdan** brand, which has all but disappeared in recent history, is also being revived—by none other than Canadian Patrick Cox, known for his Wannabe line of shoes in London. There's a big Jourdan shop on the Champs-Elysées, at no. 86 (Métro: Franklin Roosevelt).

PARIS ICONS

Best Existing Ethnic

MIA ZIA
4 rue Caumartin, 9e (Métro: Havre-Caumartin).

This store hasn't been around forever, but it has taken its place as almost a French classic in terms of drama and importance in style. Here, Northern Africa meets the Mediterranean meets international chic in just the right colors to make you feel like a gypsy nomad without looking like you're ready for Halloween. There are stores in several big French cities.

Best Hidden Store

ASTIER DE VILLATTE
173 rue St-Honoré, 1er (Métro: Palais Royal).

Astier de Villatte is one of the smallest shops I've ever been in; the medieval home turned store is hidden in plain sight and you would walk right by if you didn't know it was there. It sells many gift and tabletop items, but mainly it sells style. Astier de Villatte's handmade white porcelain serving pieces are sold in the U.S. for twice as much, and redefine chic as well as minimalist pleasure. Eat that, Armani Casa.

Best Food Markets

Sunday mornings, real foodies and gourmands should head to **rue Cler,** 7e (Métro: Latour Marbourg). Also on Sundays is an organic *bio* (pronounced bee-oh) market that is fabulous,

but a tad esoteric: **boulevard de Raspail,** 6e (Métro: Sèvres-Babylone).

Best Weekly Flea Market

Close to central Paris, **Puces de Vanves,** 14e (Métro: Porte de Vanves), is a tag sale sort of thing. This Saturday and Sunday market is the real insider's place to get a bargain. On Sunday, there's also a fruit and food market one street over. Note that the market is over by 1pm.

Best Marketing Notion

Little Black Dress
125 galerie de Valois, Jardin du Palais Royal, 1er (Métro: Palais Royal).

Didier Ludot became famous in Paris about 20 years ago as the majordomo of important vintage clothing. His business has grown and expanded, as has his reputation. Now there's Little Black Dress, which carries new little black dresses inspired by the vintage clothing he sells. The shop is in the Jardin du Palais Royal, on the opposite side from Ludot's vintage business. Dresses cost about $150 to $200; they are also sold from his shop in the department store Au Printemps.

PRODUCTS WITH A TWIST

TOILETTE INTIME All cultures have feminine cleansing products, but the French invented the bidet and a staggering number of products to go with it. The Roger Cavaille brand offers three different hygienic cleansers, each adapted to the needs of the modern woman. (Could I make this stuff up?)

LE STRING You may know scanty undies as a thong, but in France, it's *le string* because it really is only a string in there—these have been banned in high schools to prevent

Monica Lewinsky–like behavior. Buy them at specialty stores or department stores' lingerie sections; prices start at 6€ ($6.90).

EASY CREDIT Colette is a gallery-cum-store which for 10 years has offered *outre* products to the French. The latest fad is a credit card holder (in alligator) that you wear around your neck so you don't have to tire yourself out searching through your handbag for the plastic.

Chapter Five

SHOPPING THE WINE REGIONS: CHAMPAGNE, BURGUNDY & BORDEAUX

CHAMPAGNE

Champagne is a French *département* and the name of a very particular drink. By law, if the grapes for this sparkling wine aren't grown in this region of France, the bubbly ain't champagne. If it is champagne, then officially it's capitalized, (making it Champagne).

If you look closely at a map, you'll realize that the *département* of Champagne is shaped like the letter *C;* most of the famous bottlers are to the north, while some are more in the south. There are factory outlets in the south, in and around the town of Troyes (pronounced *trois,* like the number 3).

Locals take day trips from Paris to either northern or southern Champagne; there are also tourist overnights and fancy tours that go to Troyes for the shopping and then to Epernay for the tasting.

Charm Warning

Before you get all excited about Reims, the capital of the Champagne region, or start wondering how many bottles of bubbly are on the wall, let me warn you that if you are thinking romantic, if you are thinking beautiful, you might want to sit

down now and try to cope before you are off, running, and daydreaming.

Reims is not adorable. It was bombed in World War I (although the vineyards weren't), and although it has a very nice Gothic cathedral (bombed but not ruined), there is not a lot of quaint charm to win over your heart and head. That said, Reims is a terrific place to have some fun, tour a few caves, buy champagne, and eat gourmet meals. And if you want charm, you can go to Troyes. Epernay is more charming than Reims—and closer.

Reims & Surroundings

You might not be able to spell it (I thought there was an *h* in there somewhere) or pronounce it (say *Rance*), but you do know this town as the heart of the French Champagne district.

Getting to Reims

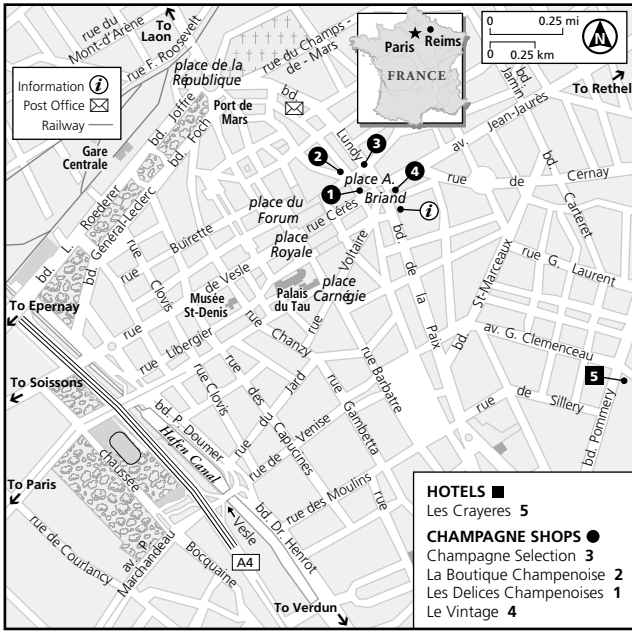
Most of the big-brand champagne houses are within the city limits of either Reims or Epernay, but Reims is on the main train line, while Epernay, which is technically closer to Paris, is not. The smaller brands tend to be in smaller towns along the Route du Champagne.

Catch the train at the Gare de l'Est in Paris; it's a 90-minute trip. You can buy tickets ahead of time through **Rail Europe** in the U.S. (✆ **877/456-RAIL;** www.raileurope.com/us). When the TGV-East opens in 2007, Reims will be one of the stations, accessible via Lille or Marseille.

Driving from Paris to Champagne is very easy: Just head out past Disneyland Paris on the A4, pay a few tolls (by credit card, if you like), and pick your exit depending on the houses you wish to visit. As you drive, you can see the new TGV-East tracks and stations as they are being built.

Getting Around Reims

The train station is alongside downtown Reims; you can walk just about everywhere in the downtown area, but the cathedral



is across town. There are taxis waiting at the train station, and some drivers will make a deal for a day of sightseeing. To call a taxi 24 hours a day, dial ✆ **03-26-47-05-05.**

If you're going for a simple overnight and a little sightseeing, eating, and sleeping, you do not need a car. If, however, you want to really see the area and the vines, you do need to drive.

Sleeping in Reims

Most of the famous kitchens in Reims also have rooms, since people like to linger over a gourmet dinner or want to drink.

Les Crayeres

64 bd. Henry Vasnier, Reims.

Not only is this the number-one choice for all discriminating visitors, but it is often named one of the top five hotels in the

world. Although the formal name of this restaurant and hotel is Les Crayeres, most people call it Boyer, in honor of the famous chef who is now retired from the kitchen.

Located across the street from the Pommery château and almost in the heart of town, this manor house is set in a small park and comes complete with so many luxuries, you'll have to pinch yourself to make sure it's all real.

Rates begin at 265€ ($305) and go up to about 500€ ($575). And that doesn't usually include breakfast. Book in the U.S. through **Relais & Châteaux** (✆ **800/735-2478**). Local phone ✆ 03-26-82-80-80. Fax 03-26-82-65-52. www.relaischateaux.com.

Royal Champagne

Champillon-Epernay.

Royal Champagne is for those who prefer to be closer to Epernay than to Reims, more out on the Route du Champagne; it's also a tad closer to Troyes. (Troyes is slightly more than an hour from Epernay.)

This lush property was created from a former post house. The rooms are huge and really nice—and each has a sweeping view of the vines. The feel is not as grand manor house as Boyer, but it is very, very nice and quite plush, with decorations in the local rustic style. Again, there's a famous chef and good eats to be had here.

There are 27 rooms; rates begin around 250€ ($288), but there are promotional deals. From the U.S., call **Relais & Châteaux** (✆ **800/735-2478**). Local phone ✆ 03-26-52-87-11. www.relaischateaux.com/royalchampagne.

Shopping in Reims

SHOPPING HOURS Most stores in Reims are open from 9am to noon and 2 to 7pm. The *hypermarchés* (modern dry-goods stores) are open nonstop until 9pm. (Frankly, though, they don't have that much good champagne, and their prices aren't much lower than anyone else's.) Some stores open at 10am

and remain open during the lunch hours. Monday mornings are slow.

REAL-PEOPLE SHOPPING In keeping with the feel of the town, the real people's "downtown" shopping district isn't very cute, either. The main drag is Victor Hugo, where there's a decent branch of **Galeries Lafayette** (with supermarket). You'll find more commercial shopping and mass-market brands (and **Monoprix**) at place d'Erlon.

MARKETS & FAIRS Markets are open in Reims from 6am to 1pm every day except Sunday. On the first Sunday of every month, except in August, there is a flea market from 8am to 7pm at the Parc des Expositions. **Galerie Jamin** (6 rue Jamin) is open Monday and Friday from 2 to 7pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 7pm.

FINDS Because most people go to Reims partly to see the incredible cathedral, it's important to know that you can gawk, worship, and then go shopping all in the same space. There are a handful of excellent wine shops here that sell many, many brands and offer great gifts.

Almost all the shops sell chocolate champagne corks, which make a super gift. I'm also big on small bottles of champagne for the folks back home, so that they can taste a range of bubblies, and I love the fact that a few houses (Moët in particular) make six-packs of small bottles. Another novelty item comes from Pommery—it's a small (200ml) bottle of champagne called Pop. It was designed for teens and tweens, to be drunk with a straw and to teach them the taste of fine champagne.

Champagne Selection

Face à la Cathédrale.

This store does not sell champagne. Rather, it makes custom champagne corks, so you can get ones that announce the baby or celebrate a big birthday. You can provide a photo of the celebrant to be imprinted on the metal top that goes over the cork. The minimum order is 250 pieces, which costs about 87€

($100). A bottle can be personalized in 2 minutes. Other novelties are available as well.

La Boutique Champenoise
5 place du Cardinal Luçon.

This isn't as cute or elegant as other shops in the area, but it's jammed with merchandise and has probably the best prices.

La Vinocave
45 place Drouet d'Erion.

This store is toward the end of the pedestrian shopping street that leads from the Reims train station toward downtown and the cathedral. You'll recognize it by the 3-foot-tall bottles of champagne standing outside. Inside, the large selection includes both big-name and little-known makers. The helpful staff speaks English.

Le Parvis
Place du Cardinal Luçon.

This shop has a large selection of bottles and a helpful staff.

Les Delices Champenoises
2 rue Rockefeller.

How can you not love a champagne store that's open daily? It sells all brands, big and small.

Le Vintage
1 cours Anatole France.

Located directly across from the rear of the cathedral, this store has a huge selection of champagne, including small-size bottles of the *grandes marques,* which make great gifts. I never knew there were so many choices. I paid about 14€ ($16) for a half-bottle of Bolly to bring home. This is the best of the several boutiques around the cathedral.

About Those Cookies

You can buy biscuits de Reims in any grocery store in France, but if you want the real thing from the real source, check out **Fossier,** 25 cours Jean-Baptiste-Langlet, Reims, which opens Monday through Friday at noon. The point of the biscuit is that you don't get drunk and they get dunked. Fossier is the most famous brand, and the *rose* is preferred.

Touring the Champagne Houses

Many of the champagne houses have two (or more) addresses, since each has both a showroom and an actual château out in the fields, where the grapes are grown. Most often, the château is used for private functions or can be visited only by appointment.

A few of the big houses own several brands, so the addresses are the same. Don't worry.

Call before you drive any great distance, as there may be a closer address for what you want to see, taste, or buy.

Sipping Hours

Most champagne houses follow the same hours as local retail shops: They open at about 9:30am and close for lunch around noon. Many close at 11:30am so that the final groups are out by noon; one or two actually close at 11am. After lunch, they reopen, usually at 2pm. Champagne houses close for the day at various times—some at 3:30pm, some at 7pm. Anything in between is also possible. Hours may vary with the season.

Believe it or not, most champagne houses are open on Sunday! However, some of them are closed on Monday and Tuesday.

Money Matters

Many châteaux have elaborate visitor centers and tours (even train rides). Most of them charge a fee for the tour, usually from

5€ to 10€ ($5.75–$12) per head (it can be more—ask). The price of admission includes a glass of champagne at the end of the tour. If you just want to buy, you can usually be admitted directly to the shop without taking the tour.

You can also buy champagne at many stores in town or even at Carrefour, the *hypermarché* right outside town at the junction of RN31 and BP7. Carrefour may be slightly cheaper, but only by about a buck a bottle. I went, hoping to find God, but was disappointed: The selection was not very good, and the savings weren't worth the trouble.

Do not expect factory-outlet prices at the factory. In fact, prices will be only slightly lower than in Paris—and may be similar to prices at home. In some cases, prices are even better at home. Forget about airport duty-free prices in the United States or France; you'll do better on the street.

For the luxury visitor, there are package tours and day trips from Paris that include a tour of a cave and lunch at Les Crayeres. The price can be 200€ ($230) per head or more, but this is actually a bargain—and you don't have to drive, so you can drink.

RENDEZ-VOUS, SVP

It is best to have an appointment for a tour; at some houses, you will be seen only with a private appointment. Many of the houses advertise, especially in French food, wine, and cooking magazines; they also have roadside signs. Please note that just as in Bordeaux, there are a lot of mixed messages and conflicting sources of information out there.

If there is a house you'd like to visit, but someone tells you, "Oh, no, they are not open to the public," call or fax the house yourself. Also note that there is a difference between the showroom and the château, so there may be a difference in how happy one or the other is to see you.

Brace yourself for a wide discrepancy in style at the various houses. At Bolly, I found the selection terrible and the attitude

even worse. At Pommery, they were prepared for princes and kings and treated me as if I were both; the selection there is bountiful, well displayed, and easily accessed.

Also brace yourself for cultural differences and know your French manners. There's a huge difference between the big commercial houses and the tiny family houses. There are also many houses in between. I wanted to buy directly from one such house in Reims, and when I called for an appointment, it was easy and well done. When I called later to tell the house we were running late, which I thought was incredibly polite, they denied that I had an appointment and didn't know what I was talking about. Another house tried to trade me over to a sister firm, one that I had no interest in. In such situations, don't be so polite that you end up wasting your time.

Matters of Taste

It took only a few hours in Champagne for me to begin to suffer from Belgian Chocolate Syndrome, which I acquired doing research and which left me sick at the very sight of chocolate. (I have since recovered.)

Better Brands

Why does each house make several kinds of champagne, and are the more expensive cuvées worth it? You might not be able to afford it, but the difference in taste between nonvintage and vintage grande cuvée is enormous. You can pay 26€ ($30) or 56€ ($65) for a bottle of champagne, but you will be able to taste the difference. Nonvintage champagne is for those who aren't willing to spend the money to learn that there is a difference.

Note that prices of important vintages and brands can be lower in the United States than in France, especially if you luck into a year-end promotional event. Know your stuff before you commit to a big-ticket item in France. The shopping in Reims is really best for brands or vintages you can't get in America.

The Magic Flutes

The following are the big-name champagne houses in Reims and the surrounding region.

Champagne Billecart-Salmon
Château: 40 rue Carnot, Mareuil-sur-Ay.
✆ **03-26-52-60-22**

Champagne Bollinger
16 rue Jules Lobet, Ay.
✆ **03-26-53-33-88**

Champagne Krug
5 rue Coquebert, Reims.
✆ **03-26-84-44-20**
Château: Le Clos du Mesnil, Mesnil-sur-Oger.
✆ **03-26-57-51-77**

Champagne Laurent-Perrier
Tours-sur-Marne.
✆ **03-26-58-91-22**

Champagne Louis Roederer
21 bd. Lundy, Reims.
✆ **03-26-40-42-11**

Champagne Moet et Chandon
18–20 av. de Champagne, Reims.
✆ **03-26-54-71-11**
Château: Abbaye d'Hautvillers, Rue Cumières, Hautvillers.
✆ **03-26-59-42-67**

Champagne Mumm
34 rue du Champs de Mars, Reims.
✆ **03-26-49-59-70**
Château: Moulin de Verzenay, Verzenay.
✆ **03-26-49-59-69**

Champagne Piper-Heidsieck
51 bd. Henry Vasnier, Reims.
✆ **03-26-84-43-44**

Champagne Pommery
5 place du Géneral Gouraud, Reims.
✆ **03-26-61-62-55**

Champagne Ruinart
4 rue des Crayères, Reims.
✆ **03-26-77-51-51**

Champagne Taittinger
9 place St-Niçaise, Reims.
✆ **03-26-85-45-35**
Château: Château de la Marquetterie, Pierry.
✆ **03-29-54-04-53**

Champagne Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin
1 place des Droits de l'Homme, Reims.
✆ **03-26-89-53-90**

Maison Perrier-Jouet
26 av. de Champagne, Epernay.
✆ **03-26-53-38-00**

Maison Philipponnat
Château: Le Clos de Goisses, 13 rue de Pont, Mareuil-sur-Ay.
✆ **03-26-52-60-43**

Pol Roger
1 rue Henri Le Large, Epernay.
✆ **03-26-55-41-95**

The Little-Known Houses

Of course, a champagne need not be world famous to be good. Without a big advertising budget, a house may remain little known. Part of the glory of champagne shopping in Reims is that you can uncover your own finds and fall in love.

There are thousands of little champagne houses; you can drive around and taste for years. I bought just a few specialty bottles that were suggested by the wine stores in Reims or by experts. Most of these brands are carried in the stores in downtown Reims; few bottles are exported to the United States.

Please note that most of the wines I tested were vintage, top-of-the-line cuvées. It does make a difference. A nonvintage wine from the same house will not be the same. The following list mentions by name each bottle that I found so special, just to steer you toward the right taste, although you might find other vintages more appropriate when you shop:

- Clos des Goisses 1986, **Champagne Philliponnat** (13 rue de Pont, Mareuil-sur-Ay; ✆ **03-26-52-60-43**)
- n.v., **Champagne Ployez-Jacquemart** (Ludes, Rilly-la-Montagne; ✆ **03-26-61-11-87**)
- Les Mesnil 1983, **Champagne Salon** (Mesnil-sure-Oger; ✆ **03-26-57-51-65**)
- Grande Cuvée 1985, **Champagne Alain Theinot** (4 rue des Moissons, Reims; ✆ **03-26-47-41-25**)
- n.v., **Champagne Vilmart** (4 rue de la République, Rilly-la-Montagne; ✆ **03-26-03-40-01**)

Troyes

If you want a totally different area of the *département* Champagne, where you can sip the bubbles, see an adorable town, and get to factory-outlet stores, then perhaps Troyes should be your destination. (***Note:*** This is a lot to do in a day.)

Troyes has a fine Museum of Modern Art, marvelous architecture, and, of course, plenty of cute places to stay and eat. There are not as many American tourists here as in Reims, so you'll feel more of a sense of discovery. The problem is that you pretty much have to decide if you've come for the outlet shopping or for the other tastes of France.

I've been to every outlet in Troyes, and seeing them all is really a 2-day proposition (as long as you have the strength and the financial backing). Otherwise, you can visit for a day and pick and choose. Because the outlets are owned by different companies, they are in different parts of the city, often in towns or suburbs that are not technically called Troyes. The city center is filled with posters, signs, and billboards to guide you. Note that none of these outlet villages are cute.

Boyer's Babies

I asked three-star chef Gérard Boyer, still the biggest star in Reims despite retirement from the stove, for his list of favorite small houses. Here are his choices (Boyer says you can use his name as a reference):

- Christian Busin, Verzenay
- Diebolt-Vallois, Cramant
- Pierre Gimonnet, Cuis
- Lasalle, Chigny-les-Roses
- Lilbert, Cramant
- Monmarthé, Ludes

Getting to Troyes

The outlets are about 1½ hours from Paris, south toward Dijon. If you do not go on an organized tour, you'll need a car. To get there, head south on the A5 and get off at exit 21 (Epernay). For directions or specifics, call the outlet center (✆ **03-25-82-00-72**) or the Troyes tourist office (✆ **03-25-73-00-36**).

Sleeping in Troyes

Hotel de la Poste
35 rue Emile-Zola, Troyes.

This four-star hotel is a member of Best Western France; it has 32 rooms. It is also right in the center of Troyes and 2 blocks from the cathedral. Rooms cost about 87€ ($100) per night. ✆ **03-25-73-05-05.**

Eating in Troyes

Le Clos Juillet
22 bd. du 14 Juillet, Troyes.

Most foodies agree that not only is this the best table in town, but it's also reason enough to visit Troyes. For reservations,

call ✆ **03-25-73-31-32.** It's closed for dinner Sunday and all day Monday.

SHOPPING THE OUTLETS

BELGRAND

5 rue Belgrand et 55 bd. du 14 Juillet, Troyes.

This small center bills itself as the "downtown" factory-outlet mall; I can't get too excited about it except that it has Rodier.

MACARTHUR GLEN

Zone Nord, voie du Bois, Pont-Ste-Marie.

This is a lot less cute than it used to be, but then maybe you don't care about cute. MacArthur Glen has an international array of outlets, including Armani, Calvin Klein, Versace, Nike, Mephisto, and, of course, McDo (which is what locals call McDonald's). It's open Monday from 2 to 7pm, Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 7pm, and Saturday from 9:30am to 7pm.

These guys have a *navette* (shuttle-bus) service that runs between Paris and the mall. For information, call (toll-free in France) ✆ **08-00-80-92-43;** the pickup point in Paris was once place Concorde, and then it moved to Bastille, so be sure to check. Also note that the bus goes to only this mall; the other outlets are too far away to make walking between them possible.

MARQUES AVENUE

114 bd. de Dijon, St-Julien.

Marques Avenue (www.marquesavenue.com) was one of the first outlet malls in France and remains very French in style. This is the largest and most famous outlet mall; the brands are the most well known in France, short of being Lacroix, Balmain, or St-Laurent.

Some 800m (2,624 ft.) from the five-building Marques Avenue complex is a separate part of the mall, called Marques Avenue Maison & Decoration, with 30 shops devoted to home style.

MARQUES CITY
Rue Danton, Pont-Ste-Marie.

This is the most low-end of the outlet malls; it's also the smallest. (It's not really a mall, but more a grouping of stores and freestanding buildings.) But it does have Etam stock (inexpensive high-fashion clothes for teens and tweens)—so if you're an Etam fan, you may have fun.

BURGUNDY

Perhaps most Americans knew about wines from Burgundy before they learned their Bordeaux, but face it—the Bordeaux has quite a run as the snob's choice. These days, of course, international wines are the rage and French wines are being re-thunk, especially by Americans. Suddenly the Burgundy region has become more and more interesting, not only for the wines and the vines but also because it's not considered as touristy or overwrought as Provence.

The Burgundy region is closer to Paris, and though the weather may not be as good as in the south or in Provence, there's a whole lot of wine going on. The small area between Dijon and Lyon is now ripe for discovery.

Dijon

I recently read that *Dijon Vu* is the fear of mustard you have already seen. Dump those fears, as this is not going to be the problem when you get to Dijon—there are so many unusual mustards that you will consider buying a hot-dog stand. But wait, the subject was roses . . . and the vineyards that go with the roses. (When you start touring the vineyards, you will note that each row of vines has its own rose bush, an early warning sign for the detection of pestilence.) Dijon is the start of a visit to Burgundy and the capital of the region.

So welcome to Dijon, where the shopping is easy, the food is fun, and the architecture will fill your soul with the wonders

of wandering France. This is one of the most user-friendly cities in the country; you will love to shop and stroll . . . and snack.

And yes, you can do Dijon as a day trip from Paris, and without a car—you won't get much feel for the grape, but you can have a nice day out and see a few brands of mustard you might not otherwise find in Paris.

Getting to Dijon

Take a TGV train from Paris—the ride's a little more than 2 hours—or drive (about 3 hr.). The Dijon station is technically within walking distance of town, but not really—especially if you have luggage.

If you want to really see the countryside, you will need a car, but then, if you really want to drink, you will need a designated driver.

The Lay of the Land

Dijon is the Queen of Burgundy, so a visit here incorporates not only an adorable medieval town, and all that mustard, but also the regional foodstuffs and wines of the entire area.

Like most medieval French cities, the downtown area is restored and charming; malls and big-box stores are located outside of town.

Various cutie-pie towns are located downriver from Dijon, as is the Burgundy wine district. If you have a rental car, head south on the N74, the road right through the Côte d'Or and more vineyards (called *domaines*) than you can imagine. For specifics on Beaune, see later in this chapter.

If you are on a barge tour, you will probably use Dijon as your turn-around city and then get to many of the small villages via river.

Getting Around Dijon

Although Dijon has more to it than a fancy high street, everything in city center is pretty much within walking distance and is well organized.

Sleeping in Dijon

Hotel Sofitel La Cloche
14 place Darcy, Dijon.

This is *the* hotel in town—it's a four-star and it's a Sofitel. Furthermore, it's within walking distance of everything. The hotel is not a grand palace, but it is classified as a national monument. Interiors have some charm: Some of the rooms have the original beams; there are apartments as well. Rates are about 150€ ($173) per night. ✆ **03-80-30-12-32.** www.hotel-lacloche.com.

A Brief History of the Dukes

Since this part isn't often taught in American grade schools, it's easy to get confused about the part wherein Burgundy was a separate country and then part of Italy before it ended up in France. This enormously rich real estate brought much power to the dukes of Bourgogne, who were major players in medieval times. There were four dukes, ruling from 1342 to 1477 but setting the seat of power for centuries to come. Today, many historical references and parts of Dijon date back to the 14th century.

Along with this wealth and history came a very specific type of architecture, *faience* (painted, glazed, monochromatic earthenware), furniture (big, heavy, carved), and food—after all, where do you think *boeuf bourguignon* came from? And who invented the drink called a Kir? (M. Kir was once mayor of Dijon, folks.) Cassis is another regional foodstuff, a fruit very similar to the grape but with its own uses in wine or baking.

And because this is a short history of the Middle Ages, I am not even going to mention Alesia, which shoppers know as the name of a street in Paris with many stock shops. Historians know it as a battlefield in the Burgundy region where the Romans defeated the local thugs (played by Gérard Depardieu in the movie version) and took France. Hail Caesar.

A Brief History of Mustard

This has nothing to do with Colonel Mustard, and much to do with shopping in this part of France, so pay attention. You can thank not only Marco Polo for bringing mustard to Europe, but also the medieval pharmacists' guild for making this seed the germ of big enterprise. By the 13th century, Dijon had developed a reputation and even supplied the king's court with its mustards. Thereafter, all aristocratic banquets served mustard from Dijon. But Grey Poupon did not rest—by 1740 there was a mustard war between Paris and Dijon, and flavored or aromatic mustards were invented. In 1742, the house of Maille was founded—and the rest is, well, history.

Best Buys

Okay, so you think I'm an idiot—you have fancy mustard available in the U.S. and you know you'll visit other French cities that undoubtedly have mustard. Hell, you even see it at French train stations and airports. But wait—Dijon has a downright shocking number of flavored mustards that you simply cannot find anyplace else. Some are outright strange (violette?), which makes them the perfect gift. The price is right, too: A small jar of mustard usually costs less than 2.60€ ($3), and designer mustard rarely costs much more. Note that a selection of mustards in a cute package is usually more expensive than individual jars.

Dijon is also famous for its *pain d'épice,* which translates as "spiced bread" and is somewhat like gingerbread. But this product also comes in assorted flavors, many of which may be totally new taste sensations. Don't have the preconceived taste of American gingerbread in mind before you nibble. The most famous maker is **Mulot et Petitjean,** with three shops in Dijon and one in Beaune.

Also try the local candy that's called a *Jacqueline,* sold at **A. Michelin,** 18 rue Lusette. It was first created in 1926 and represents the tears of a woman named Jacqueline.

Shopping Neighborhoods

MAIN STREET The high street with most French brands and multiples, and even McDonald's, is called rue de la Liberté. There's a famous mustard shop here (**Maille,** no. 32), near a bakery famous for *pain d'épice* (**Mulot et Petitjean,** no. 16).

BEHIND LIBERTE If you're walking on rue de la Liberté with the Sofitel La Cloche to your back, then at midpoint on the right side is a small mall and an entirely hidden shopping area, anchored by **Monoprix.** Go out the other side of Monoprix and you'll be on rue Piron, a secondary high street with brands such as **Marina Rinaldi** and **L'Occitane,** as well as stores you may have never seen (try **Fruits & Passion,** no. 25, for bath products) and many local mom-and-pop shops.

HIDDEN LUXE Nestled between these two streets, in a far corner, is a tiny alley—no through traffic—called the rue Amiral Roussin, only a block long and filled with big-name stores. Perhaps the best store in Dijon is here: **Les Appartements de JuJu** (no. 39), which sells women's fashion brands such as Yohji and Dries.

DOWNTOWN CROSS STREETS Running on a grid system between rue de la Liberté and the market hall are a series of small pedestrian streets devoted to shopping ops, cafes, and the like. They have names like rue François-Rude, rue de Godrans, and rue du Bourg. There are some brands in here, but also local heroes—plus most of the city's best food suppliers (see below). Closer to the main Poste, at place Grangier, you'll find a small, freestanding branch of **Hermès** (no. 12). Not far away is home-style guru **Geneviève Lethu** (15 place Grangier).

MARKET **Les Halles Centrales** is the covered market building made of wrought iron in a style you thought was lost when Britain's Brighton Pier sank last year. This building is the center of an entire market district that goes on for blocks and weaves its way all over the heart of town.

To Market, to Market

Market days are Monday, Thursday, and Friday mornings and all day Saturday. The market in Dijon is so wonderful that it deserves a special trip—plan your visit to include one market day, even in winter. Inside the market building, you'll find the usual suspects along with plenty of surprises, including a dealer who specializes in food supplies from Vietnam. Yet the Market Hall is just a small part of the show. Out on the streets, you can buy everything from fashion to copies of medieval tapestries. There's also a small flea market at place Grangier. Yawn.

Department Stores

Galeries Lafayette
41 rue de la Liberté.

Not only is this a larger than average branch of the famed department store, but it also has a fabulous gourmet grocery store in the basement. (***Note:*** Much of the gourmet merchandise is also sold at Monoprix for a few cents less.) The store itself carries many fashion brands and offers tax refunds for those who spend 175€ ($201).

Monoprix
11 rue Piron.

One of the best Monoprix in any city center, this one has a good-size supermarket upstairs (with an excellent selection of mustards and *pain d'épice*) and the best prices in town. You can also buy clothes for the family, home style, makeup, books, maps, and more.

Foodie Finds

Au Parrian Genereux
21 rue du Bourg.

The local master chocolatier.

Bourgogne Saveurs
14 rue Musette.

Local foodstuffs in a fancy setting—pick from wines, jams, mustards, and more.

Cassis Vedrenne
1 rue Brossuet.

This firm also has a shop in Beaune. It's devoted to showcasing the local fruit champions in liqueurs and confitures.

Le Chalet Comtois
28 rue Musette.

Cheese heaven. Enough said.

Maille
32 rue de la Republique.

Located in the old Grey Poupon shop, this store sells its mustards as well as other foodstuffs and ceramic mustard jars. It doesn't have nearly the range of flavors you would imagine, but does have some worth snapping up, including Provençal (coral-colored and spicy), cassis, and honey. The shop in Paris (place de la Madeleine) is actually cuter and better stocked with non-mustard merchandise.

Maison Auger
61 rue de la Liberté; 21 place Darcy.

Along with Mulot et Petitjean, the other king of *pain d'épice*.

Spécialités Yazquez
Rue Musette and rue Quentin.

This is the most exotic of the small food markets and the most Mediterranean in terms of product range and choice. Much is sold from outside, including a very wide selection of mustards

in unusual (some very unusual) flavors. I paid 1.30€ ($1.50) and 1.40€ ($1.60) for various jars, only to find the same brand for less at Monoprix. Still, this place is charming and adorable and everything you dream of in a market-souk movie set.

YVES NICOT
48 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

This is one of the most famous *caves* (wine cellars) in the area and a great place to start for those interested in local wines, partly because of the knowledge of M. Nicot himself.

Beaune

Say the name of this town the way you feel about it (in French, of course): *Bon.* After you've mastered that, get your hotel reservation: This is a major tourist destination and is mobbed the minute the weather gets good—as well as during special events and wine auctions. And no, the famous *Hospices* is not a hospital.

Beaune is simply one of those adorable, cutie-pie towns that is perfect in every detail except its popularity—it can be mobbed. If you drive here, park or leave the car at your hotel; if you come by boat—lucky you. The town is medieval in its layout, which means it's somewhat circular and snail shaped, so you can just wander until lost and found.

This is not really shopping paradise—there are a few French multiples and many, many wine shops selling souvenirs, carafes, decanters, and postcards. You will have no trouble finding wine by the bottle or the case, and will be swamped with wine-inspired gift items. *Caves* for tastings are in and outside of town.

The town is located only a half-hour south of Dijon. To get here by train from Paris, you must change to a regional train in Dijon. If you're driving, you'll pass through many of the most famous names in wine. There are taxis and shuttles from Dijon into the nearby villages.

If you're spending the night, you want to stay within walking distance of the action. My first choice is **Hôtel de la Poste,**

5 bd. Clémenceau (✆ **03-80-22-08-11**), where rooms begin at 100€ ($115) for a single. Right down the street is **Le Cep,** 27 rue Maufoux (✆ **03-80-22-08-11**), which is also nice and charges similar rates. Both of these are four-star hotels. Hôtel de la Poste has its own parking area.

Note: For my first overnight in Beaune, I chose a place to stay from a guide of cute hotels. I verified the information by phone when I booked. When I got there, I was shocked by what the owner defined as "in town" and canceled my reservation. I was lucky to find something much better for my needs. Be warned that this is high tourist territory; anything goes.

If you have a car and prefer to be tucked away in your own château at night, there are several deluxe ones in the area that take guests. **Hostellerie de Levernois** is a member of Relais & Châteaux; go to www.levernois.com for details.

For guides to the nearby châteaux, winery visits, or cooking classes with local chefs, get a list at the tourist office. You can even arrange a visit to **La Moutarderie Fallot** (www.fallot.com), a mustard-making factory with museum and shop. The mustard tour costs 10€ ($12) per person.

Market Days

All markets are held in the mornings only. The Beaune gourmet market is on Wednesday; the main market and *brocante* are on Saturday. Meursault is on Friday. Nolay is on Monday. And Savigny les Beaune is on Sunday.

BORDEAUX

Ah Bordeaux, I blush, I laugh, I giggle, I seethe when I realize it's time to fess up. I hate Bordeaux because every time I've been here, I've been lost. That's not a very good excuse, I know, I know. I wholeheartedly welcome you to the Bordeaux area . . . and the rest, well, welcome and we'll figure it all out together.

I love the areas around Bordeaux and recommend them—from various domains to the wine spa in Martillac (Les Source

de Caudalie), even Arachon, a beach area that has a nearby wealthy community that has everything to do with money and not much to do with wine. I've recently become interested in the wines of the Blaye district, which is nearby—so yes, I'd go there, too.

But metro Bordeaux? Forget it! I was once so lost that I had to hire a taxi so I could follow it to my hotel. I'll admit that it's easier if you arrive by cruise ship and don't have to deal with the sprawl of this town.

The Lay of the Land

Where there's wine, there's rivers, so this area feeds off the Gironde and the Garonne rivers and nestles into a bicoastal niche formed off a peninsula jutting into the ocean.

Many of the nearby domains and/or châteaux are so famous, they're brand names. The various areas do take on their own personalities, but you'll have visitors who like certain mini-regions because of their preference for the wine of those areas.

My late husband and I did one of those driving trips where we thought we'd just poke along the roads, take in the villages, and stop at various châteaux. For the most part it was a bust—few of the châteaux take walk-ins, and things didn't always go smoothly even when we had appointments. Out of a handful of visits, only one was a truly wonderful experience.

On the other hand, I went on a bus tour of the St-Emilion area and found it delightful—often the vineyards are geared toward tour groups, and they sure get more friendly when there are 30 people hanging around.

Surely, my best visit to the area involved arrival at the Bordeaux train station with pickup from the wine spa, a drive through the vines that I didn't have to navigate, and a luxurious few days—tour of château included—at Les Sources de Caudalie on the property of Château Smith Haut-Lafitte.

Obviously this area offers many, many choices—having the wine experience does not necessarily mean a trip into

downtown Bordeaux. You may want to work with either your favorite wine-tasting towns or a well-known hotel chain (such as Relais & Châteaux) to find choices that are outside of downtown Bordeaux.

The *grands crus,* and therefore the basic wine-growing areas, are:

- Médoc
- St-Emilion
- Pessac-Leognan
- Graves
- Sauternes
- Barsac
- Pomerol

Downtown Bordeaux

Alas, I let my obsessions about getting lost get in the way. Bordeaux is a large town set within a huge ring road. In fact, there are actually two ring roads. What you really want is Old Bordeaux.

In reality, Bordeaux is not only a great town but also one that keeps getting more interesting, partly because of M. Alain Juppe, the controversial mayor and president *manqué* of France. As France's provinces have stopped being provincal, Bordeaux has taken a lead among the most interesting of the cities headed into new futures.

This is a city famous not as a medieval shrine (although there are parts that date back into the 1500s), but more as an artistic and business center from the 17th century on. This is a city that has considered itself sophisticated for many centuries.

As for the joys of Old Bordeaux, there's a nice bunch of historic buildings, a lot of good museums, and the thriving wine business, as well as much interest in contemporary art and home design. Shopping is secondary to pure visual delight in the historic parts of town. If you stick to the main shopping

districts listed below, you can walk everywhere and you won't get lost.

Getting Around Bordeaux

If you stick to the main areas and the *quais,* you can walk to most places of historic and shopping interest. Bordeaux also has a rather unique tram system that is part of the new technology and will have some 84 stations by 2007. (It now has 50-odd.)

Sleeping in Bordeaux

RADISSON SAS GRAND HOTEL BORDEAUX
2–5 place de la Comédie.

This was originally built as *the* grand hotel of Bordeaux, but over the course of time fell into a state of disrepair and had to be shut down. New ownership has now decided to extend and convert the existing structure into an international first-class property, to be reopened in early 2006. It will have 150 rooms, two restaurants, a lobby bar, a wine-tasting bar, meeting facilities, and a health club. The hotel has a superb location, right in the heart of the city center. From the U.S., call **✆ 888/201-1718.** www.radisson.com.

Eating in Bordeaux

BRASSERIE LE NOAILLES
12 allées de Tourny.

The *in* place, with a great location and local heroes to stare at. For reservations, call **✆ 05-56-81-94-45.**

CAFE DU MUSEE
CAPC Museum, 7 rue Ferrère.

The cafe in this contemporary art museum was created by Andrée Putman. The food is by Gregory de Lepinay, who also has his own bistro called Chez Greg.

Shopping in Bordeaux

Shopping Neighborhoods

QUAIS DES CHARTRONS The harbor, along with the old warehouses for merchants and wines. Follow your nose away from the *quais* along rue du Faubourg des Arts and you'll pass the home-style and -decor district. There are also some antiques stores right on the *quai;* try **Espace Antiquites** (no. 56).

COURS CLEMENCEAU Main street for luxury shopping, with all the big names you expect to find in any world-class shopping city. Don't miss **Jean Vier** (no. 40), a shop selling its own brand of Basque textiles. The area between here and the Opéra is called the *Triangle d'Or* (Golden Triangle) because all the big brands and luxury labels have their stores here.

OPERA Don't miss the Opéra itself while you're looking for the stores; it inspired the Opéra Garnier in Paris (so they say). There are many luxe stores dotted into the allées de Tourny, including **Cadiot-Badie,** a fancy, old-fashioned chocolate shop known for its truffles. There's also the **Parfumerie de l'Opéra,** which carries many hard-to-find fragrances (stop here if you're not going to be shopping in Paris). Among my favorites in this allée is **Compagnie Française de l'Orient et de la Chine,** which sells clothes and home style from China.

COURS DE L'INTENDANCE The third stroke of the triangle, with more big names and big brands. This runs east–west.

PLACE GAMBETTA Transitional landmark for shoppers moving between the Golden Triangle and the antiques district. There are several big-name stores here as well, including **Hermès.**

GALERIE DES GRANDS HOMMES It's a minimall with many brand names, right at the place des Grands Hommes in the center of the Golden Triangle.

RUE STE-CATHERINE This pedestrian street is more commercial, with the department store **Nouvelles Galeries** (no. 50–60), a division of Galeries Lafayette. Rue Ste-Catherine runs

north–south, heading into the Golden Triangle at a perpendicular angle. It's the heart of a pedestrian shopping district between the Bourse and place Gambetta.

BOUFFARD A district of antiques stores, with the rue des Remparts running alongside. Note that shops may open late in the day (say, 11am or noon); most are closed entirely on Mondays. Don't miss **Passage Saint-Michel,** 14 & 17 place Canteloup (✆ **05-56-92-14-76**), with some 50 *brocante* dealers of all styles and prices. There's also rue Nôtre Dame and **Le Village Notre Dame.**

REAL-PEOPLE SHOPPING

You won't have trouble meeting personal needs in any *pharmacie,* Galeries Lafayette, or shopping mall. To find the pharmacist on duty on Sundays, call ✆ **05-56-01-02-03.** If you need a hairdresser, there's a branch of **Jacques Dessange** right at 20 cours Clémenceau (✆ **05-56-44-74-91** for appointments).

THEME SHOPPING

Obviously you expect to find wine stores here, and the usual big names and chains, but there's also an interesting connection with British brands due to the centuries-old trade across the sea, directly between Bordeaux and the U.K. Brands such as **Penhaligon's,** 14 cours Clémenceau, have outposts here, and a store called **Covent Garden,** 52 cours Clémenceau, specializes in Brit brands.

With the proximity to the sea, there are also many products with nautical themes.

WINE STORES

AMOUR DU VIN
10 cours de Verdun.

The Sam's of Bordeaux vineyards.

LA VINOTHEQUE DE BORDEAUX
8 cours du XXX Juillet.

This one is my favorite—it reps several hundred local vineyards.

L'INTENDANT
2 allées de Tourny.

This store is amazing to look at from all aspects, with over 15,000 bottles.

Chapter Six

SHOPPING THE TEXTILE CITIES: LYON, LILLE & BIARRITZ

WELCOME TO THE FRENCH TEXTILE CITIES

France has been famous for the quality of its textiles for centuries. The northern, more industrial part of France still houses factories—some of which are working factories, while some have been turned into our favorite kind of store, factory outlets. Of course, many factories have closed, as is the way of the modern world.

Lyon, which is south of Paris and on the road to Provence and the Côte d'Azur, has long been the silk center of France and is where Hermès makes its scarves (sorry, no outlet store). As science and technology have advanced, Lyon has become a center for cottons, knits, and especially bathing suits and lingerie. Several international textile trade fairs are held in Lyon each year.

Lille is cotton land, where most of the textiles for bed linen are made. There are tons of outlet stores here, including one in the Porthault factory. Not familiar with Porthault? This old French firm is considered by many to make the best and most luxurious linens in the world. If you buy in one of its tony retail stores, you will pay more than 870€ ($1,000) for a king-size

sheet. At the outlet, I bought sheets for 87€ ($100) each. (***Note:*** American beds tend to be larger than French beds by a few inches, so note the measurements when you buy sheets for use in the U.S. Duvet covers will work just fine.)

With its proximity to Spain, Biarritz is a wonderful city for finding Basque textiles. Basque linens come in two shades—either bleached hard white or natural unbleached beige, with stripes of color woven through the final inches of fabric, usually toward the selvage.

Garmentos also know that the word denim comes from *de Nîmes;* Nîmes is a city in Provence and is covered in chapter 7. *Les tissus Indiennes,* the Provençal fabrics made from woodblocks first brought from India, are also covered in that chapter.

A Weekend Away

Any of the textile cities makes an excellent weekend away. All have more to them than shopping, including great museums and very fine chefs. Several rental-car agencies and hotels offer 2-night stays as part of their packages. Some of the better luxury hotels (usually in the countryside) require a minimum 2-night stay, especially during the season. These cities also participate in a weekend program that offers two hotel nights for the price of one.

Trains to the Textile Cities

Paris has different train stations to serve rail lines heading to various destinations. If you're going to Lyon, you want Gare de Lyon (which also serves the south and Provence); for Lille, you want Gare du Nord; and for Biarritz, you want Gare Montparnasse.

Lyon now has three train stations and Lille has two, so have your brain turned on while traveling. TGV trains depart from and arrive at specific stations, which are marked on the schedule. (***Note:*** Lyon St-Exupéry is the airport, not downtown.)

LYON

Originally, I thought I could do Lyon as a day trip, sort of a shop-and-see mission with lots of eating thrown in. I don't mean that I felt that I could get to know a city in a day. I thought with TGV service at a mere 2 hours, I could go, do a little looking around, have lunch at one of the famed multi-star tables, sample Bernachon's chocolates, and call it a day trip. Silly *moi.*

I stayed for 3 days on my first visit and started babbling about moving there. I have been returning to Lyon regularly ever since. Lyon has a lot more to offer than you might think; the recent addition of a truly world-class luxury hotel has also made a big difference.

So welcome to Lyon, the perfect place to go for a day, a week, or maybe a lifetime. Welcome to Lyon, one of France's biggest towns, offering industry and commerce as well as daily food markets, a picturesque Old Town, a serious food and wine tradition, and all sorts of shopping. Shopping for chocolates? Dreaming of a town that's famous for its chocolate shops? Did someone say let's spend the day eating chocolate?

That means that Lyon has the dual personality of a food and fabric town. Much fabric manufacturing takes place in and around Lyon—and yes, where there are factories, there have to be outlet shops. And jobbers, too.

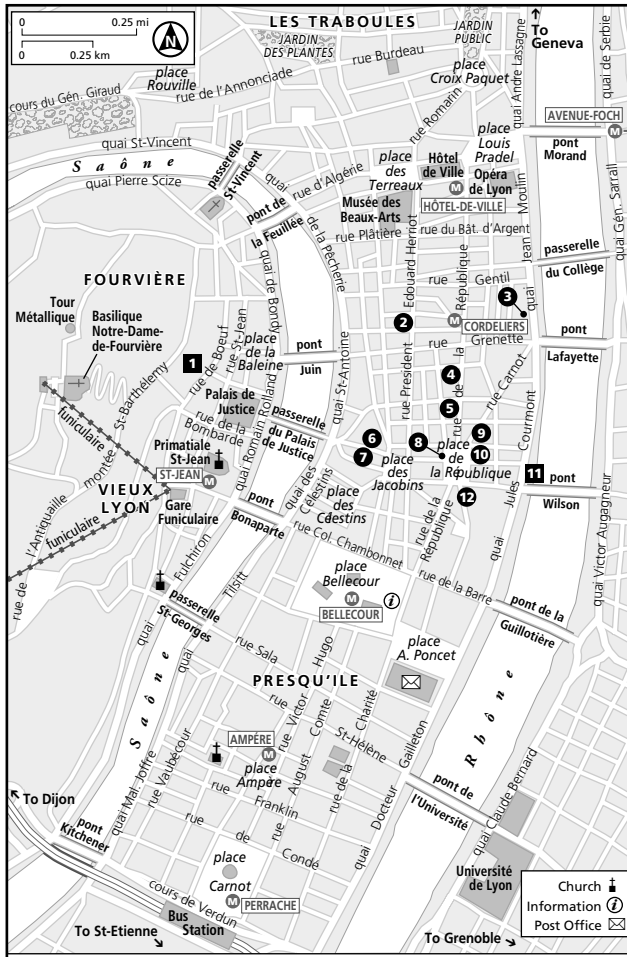
This is also a cultural kind of a place, with a gorgeous rehabbed opera house downtown. There are plenty of designer clothes to buy, as well as resale shops to survey. Most of the French majors have stores here, so you can also revisit your favorite chains. The only problem is the sprawl—you'll never have the time or the energy to see it all.

To get information about Lyon online, try www.mairie-lyon.fr or www.voilalyon.com.

Location, Location, Location

When you check your map, you'll note that Lyon is quite near the Beaujolais country. It's on the way to Geneva, and it is also

Lyon



HOTELS ■
Cour des Loges **1**
Grand Hôtel Boscolo **11**

SHOPPING ●
Anne Fontaine **4**
Au Printemps **8**
Bernardaud **6**
Etam **10**
Eurodif **5**
Galeries Lafayette **3**
Jaymes **2**
Lilith **7**
Monoprix **12**
Nature Decouvertes **9**

on the way to the south of France. While you're driving around the area, you'll see signs for the Alps and the famous ski resorts. Lyon is the center of the real France.

Getting to Lyon

BY PLANE Nonstop service to Lyon from the U.S. comes and goes with the fashions and traffic. Major carriers have offered and then discontinued the route, so ask your travel agent. Lyon is a great gateway to ski resorts or to the south of France, so if you can get a nonstop from the U.S., grab it. As we go to press, there are no nonstops; you can take a TGV train from the Paris airport into either Lyon or the Lyon airport.

BY TRAIN TGV fast trains for downtown Lyon depart Paris's Gare de Lyon every hour; the trip takes 2 hours. Beware of faster trains that may put you at the airport instead of going into town.

Lyon's modern Part Dieu train station is mostly flat and has handcarts and access for serious passenger traffic. Perrache Station is older, has no handcarts, and is not built for getting around easily.

Die-hard shoppers may want to note that Part Dieu adjoins a commercial center (a giant shopping mall), with branches of just about every French multiple as well as an office tower with Le Meridien hotel located in the middle of the tower. Go upstairs to check in.

It's technically possible to spend your day trip to Lyon at the train station and just pop out to dine in one of the famous restaurants and make a quick tour to Bernachon before heading back to Paris. Of course, that's cheating.

The Lay of the Land

Lyon is huge; the most central area is divided by the convergence of two rivers, La Saône and Le Rhône. The city is divided into *quartiers;* there are also *arrondissements* (districts), just like in Paris, but in this chapter I pretty much ignore them. Within the central core, there are good parts on both sides of

the two rivers; the heart of the city lies on a small peninsula between them called Presqu'île. To sum up, you have three main portions of downtown; let's call them:

- Old Town (Vieux Lyon)
- Midtown (Presqu'île)
- New Town (where the two main train stations are)

Note that it is possible for a tourist, especially a day-tripper, to not realize how big Lyon is and to visit only one part of the town, missing a great deal of what's available. Sticking to one part of town simplifies things if you're on a day trip, but it doesn't give you much of an understanding of Lyon or a good overview of what's available.

The Part Dieu train station, where you will probably arrive if you take the TGV from Paris, is on the farthest bank of the Rhône in the part I have named New Town. A taxi to Vieux Lyon (Old Town), on the far side of the Saône, costs about 10€ ($12). Presqu'île is where most of the shopping and tourist sights are located.

Nearby

Not to confuse the issue, but Lyon also has scads of interesting suburbs—even some of the most impressive restaurants are in suburbs rather than Lyon central. You may also find nearby towns of interest, from Vienne, known for its Roman ruins, to St-Etienne, which has been getting press for its chefs and its decorative-arts museum, to Romans, an hour south and the town where shoes are made. It's filled with shoe factory outlets (p. 217) as well as an American-style outlet mall.

Getting Around Lyon

For a day trip to Lyon, you'll probably want to cab it. For real life, I use a combination of cabs, Métro, bus, and old-fashioned foot power. The city is far too big, and the train stations are too far away, to be able to consider this a mere stroll-and-shop

kind of town. Finding a parking place for your car is too difficult to contemplate for exploration purposes. If you are just in town for a few hours, find a central parking lot on Presqu'île.

BY TAXI I admit that in some of my explorations of the town, when I was really in the further patches of tourist land, it was not easy to find a cab or even a taxi rank. Therefore, you might need to call **Allo Taxi** (✆ **04-78-28-23-23**). It has daily 24-hour service and some 300 radio taxis.

BY METRO The Métro here is great, but it is not extensive enough to completely serve you, especially if your time is limited. It's a new, modern train with clean stations and easy-to-use directions that are posted everywhere. The 1-day Ticket Liberté allows you unlimited access to the Métro; you can buy one at the tourist office, handily located in place Bellecour (✆ **04-72-77-69-69**).

BY BUS The bus is pretty easy to use once you have an idea of what's where or if you're staying at Le Meridien and want to get to the other shopping districts. The only problem is the one-way streets—this means you will not get back on the bus to return "home" where you got off. Bus fare is 1.30€ ($1.50); you can buy a ticket onboard.

Weekend en Ville

Lyon is one of several major French cities participating in a weekend promotion coordinated through **SNCF** (www.sncf.com), the French high-speed train system. You can get a discounted TGV ticket as well as two hotel nights for the price of one at zillions of participating hotels, including most of the best accommodations (though I don't think the Relais & Châteaux properties are included). Breakfast, tax, and so on are included in the promotion. Each participating city has free brochures at the tourist office. Another promotion, called Weekend Lyon Festival, offers 2 nights in a hotel, a 2-day city card, and tickets to an event. For more information, go to www.lyon-france.com.

Sleeping in Lyon

Lyon does a large convention business, so be certain you know where your hotel is located. For example, Hilton customers may be thrilled that there's a Hilton in Lyon, but this one is next to the convention center and not near anything of much charm.

Cour des Loges
6 rue du Boeuf, Old Lyon.

For years, Lyon has had nice accommodations—but not a single drop-dead, fancy-shmancy hotel. All that changed with the arrival of Cour des Loges, created from the marriage of four medieval buildings in the heart of Old Lyon.

A member of the family of Compagnie des Hôtels de Montagne (begun in Megève), this is a small, family-run operation that is all elegance and high style. The rooms are done in a medieval-moderne style, with either Renaissance Italian or contempo French savoire faire—plus Philippe Starck bathrooms. Amenities include a pool, sauna, private gardens, restaurant, and large breakfast buffet.

Rates are about 250€ ($288) per night, though they vary by season and day of the week. ***Note:*** Once you have a reservation, ask the concierge to fax you an access map—this includes the code for the otherwise pedestrian-only street. Without the code, you can't get the barrier down. Local phone **✆ 04-72-77-44-44.** www.courdesloges.com.

Grand Hotel Boscolo
11 rue Grolée.

I've stayed at this four-star hotel for years because of its location and mid-range prices; it is by no means luxe—but it's practical. The lobby has been modernized and the rooms have been renovated, but there are still old-fashioned wide corridors, high ceilings, and enormous French doors leading to balconies overlooking the Saône. You're right in the core of the city and can

walk to just about everywhere in town; a Métro stop is a block away. This may not be a five-star, drop-dead-chic hotel, but you can't beat the excellent location and great prices.

The out-of-season rate of 110€ ($127) includes a buffet breakfast. This hotel participates in the Bon Weekend program, so you can get 2 nights for the price of one. From the U.S., call ✆ **888/626-7265.** Local phone ✆ 04-72-40-45-45. Fax 04-78-37-52-55. www.boscolohotels.com.

LE MERIDIEN PART-DIEU

129 rue Servient.

I have a love-hate thing for this place simply because I hate modern, high-rise hotels that lack the least bit of charm. On the other hand, if views are your thing, then this is the right place. The hotel is situated in a tower and is said to be one of the highest up in all of France . . . so you do get a view, as well as various promotional rates. I also admit that I love sneaking over to the 260-store Part-Dieu mall next door several times a day (for a peek, go to www.partdieu.com). The hotel is next to the main train station and just a block from the main market, a kind of indoor food hall. Right outside the front door, you can catch a tram or bus to Presqu'île or other shopping destinations. You won't feel like you're in a cutie-pie town, but it is a convenient enough location. It's also great if the weather is bad, thanks to the ease with which you can get to the mall.

Rooms are about 150€ ($173) with a good deal. ***Note:*** When you arrive, you'll see a desk on the ground floor, but then you'll have to take an elevator for check-in, way up in the clouds. Local phone ✆ **04-78-63-55-20.**

Eating in Lyon

Entire books have been written about food in Lyon, so you will have no trouble driving yourself nuts with the various choices and possibilities. ***Note:*** I have had enough experience with the wander-and-choose-one method of dining out to warn you that you will most likely suffer if you do this—I've

had some disastrous meals in the two major cutie-pie restaurant districts in Old Town and Presqu'île.

Bernachon

42 and 46 cours Franklin Roosevelt.

Bernachon—one of the world's most famous chocolatiers—has its own restaurant and tearoom, called **Bernachon Passion** (no. 42). If you prefer food to go, try **Bocuse & Bernachon** (no. 46). This neighborhood, the 6e, is not far from the city's indoor food market—you can walk if you aren't carrying too many chocolate bars.

Brasserie Le Nord

18 rue Neuve, Presqu'île.

Paul Bocuse owns several bistros around town, each bearing the name of a direction. Le Nord is smack in the heart of Presqu'île and is one of my regulars—I can't help but love the traditional bistro decor, the waiters in their long aprons, the *carte* of traditional foods, and the fact that prices are not high. Call ✆ **04-78-28-24-54** for reservations.

Cafe des Negociants

1 place Françisque Regaud, Presqu'île.

This is the central hangout for just about everyone—and a good spot for a crepe, a coffee, or a meal. It's right off the main drag of Presqu'île, rue de la République, and near Monoprix.

Café Epicerie

8 rue du Boeuf, Vieux Lyon.

This is by far the best cafe in Old Lyon, especially if you're looking for comfy-trendy. The crowd is hip, the Mediteranean-inspired *carte* is not too expensive, and the presentation looks like a design magazine's spreads. Entrees are served in canning jars and the like. For reservations, call ✆ **04-72-77-44-44.**

DEBEAUX
16 rue de la République, Presqu'île.

This is one of those old-lady tearooms in France that actually feels quite chic rather than old-lady. It's good for a light lunch or snack during your shopping adventures.

Shopping in Lyon

Lyon has everything and every kind of store—they just may be harder to find than in other tourist towns because the city is so spread out. As much as I believe in wandering the streets and as much as I hate the concept of an American mall on foreign shores, you may enjoy the **Commercial Centre Part-Dieu** (across the street from the Part-Dieu train station) if you're in town for just a short period of time or if the weather is foul. Guests at Le Meridien can access the mall through a downstairs door and bridge. Part-Dieu has one of every major chain as well as a good-size supermarket where you can buy foodstuffs for picnics or gifts.

BEST BUYS

FOOD Lyon and food are synonymous, not only to the French, but also to food lovers everywhere. Many make the pilgrimage to Lyon just to eat and buy food. There is an indoor food hall not far from the Part-Dieu mall and train station (see below). You can munch on chocolate all day, although I will admit outright that after visiting a few chocolate shops, my eyes began to cross and my stomach went into knots. I found that the most heavenly chocolate was in pastry form, not candy form. Still, I bought candy bars from Bernachon as gifts for many friends.

SECONDS, OVERRUNS & ODD LOTS Lyon is surrounded by fabric mills and clothing manufacturers. I was delighted to bump into two different jobbers who specialized in unloading cheap clothing. I extended my wardrobe threefold for a mere 50€ ($58). Lyon manufacturers are particularly big on underwear and bathing suits, so these are good items to find at jobbers.

About Those Silks

I'd like to tell you that I was impressed with the silks I inspected and that the silk legend is true. But I found the silk shops in Old Town very touristy, and the silk factory in the silk district downright embarrassing. I must have been in town during cocoon season.

And since I know you want to know, here's the skinny on Hermès: Yes, the factory is in Lyon. Yes, you can take a tour if you have a VIP group or make arrangements ahead of time. But no, there is not a shop. Employees buy Hermès at any store with an employee discount. Although the style of silk screening that Hermès made famous is of a type that originated in Lyon and at one time was thought of as a citywide style, there are no other silk makers in Lyon that make anything near what Hermès does.

Shopping Hours

Stores usually open at 9:30am and close at 7 or 7:30pm. In the big shopping mall, Commercial Centre Part-Dieu, the stores are open from 10am to 7pm, 6 days a week.

Thankfully, you're in the big city now, so not that many stores close for lunch. Even though part of your day trip will involve eating at one of the famous Lyonnaise restaurants, it's nice to know that many stores are open when you want them to be. You can also have pizza for lunch (I often do) and spend more time exploring the city.

Just about everything is closed on Sunday, except in Old Lyon or the usual neighborhood food stores throughout the rest of town. But there is a big business in antiques here, especially on Sundays, and a big crafts market is also held on Sundays.

As for other markets, there is an antiques village, with fancy stuff, and one of the best flea markets I've ever been to in France, along the canal (see below). The food market along the Saône River is especially good on both Saturday and Sunday; don't miss it.

Most stores are closed on Monday mornings; some are closed all day Monday. The Part-Dieu mall and most of the large stores in Lyon are open Mondays.

Shopping Neighborhoods

Lyon is enormous. These shopping neighborhoods have been organized according to what makes sense to me—thus may mean little to a French person. Study your map as you read this to get a better understanding of the lay of the land and which parts of town you'd like to visit if you're on a limited schedule. I have included just the main shopping parts of town—no out-of-the-way finds.

MIDTOWN PRESQU'ILE Presqu'île is the name of the peninsula that juts between the two rivers. It is home to the central part of Lyon and much of the main shopping district in terms of department stores, boutiques, French multiples, and so on. Although different parts of this peninsula have different names, the heart of it, where the main shopping is located, is what I call "Midtown." On a map, this is basically the area to the right of the place Bellecour (if your back is to Part-Dieu and you are facing the Saône) and the place de la Bourse.

This area is a grid, with all the streets packed with stores. The main shopping street is rue de la République, a pedestrian mall near the place Bellecour. The commercial and mass-market brands are located here, as well as McDo and some cinema houses. For more upmarket shopping, don't overlook rue du Président Edouard Herriot, rue de Brest, or any of the streets that radiate outward from the place des Jacobins.

DELUXE PRESQU'ILE The fanciest stores and the most deluxe French names are primarily located on the rue Gasparin and the rue Emile Zola, which run parallel and are each only about a block long. Both begin at the place Bellecour and stretch toward the place des Jacobins.

FANCY ANTIQUES Leading away from the major park in the center of Presqu'île (place Bellecour) lies the very small rue Auguste Comte, which is home to a few designer shops and many upscale antiques and interior-design shops.

VIEUX LYON The Old Town part of the city is on a hill overlooking the Saône. You must first cross the river; then wander around, exploring and going up and down steps and

deciding how high you want to go. Most of the shopping is lower rather than higher, thankfully. There are no big-name stores here; this is boutique land. Note that stores in this neighborhood don't open until 11am and are closed on Mondays. It's very lively on Sundays.

CROIX ROUSSE This is the part of town where the silk weavers used to hang out; supposedly the houses were built to allow maximum light. I found only one silk factory here—it was a bust, and I think you can pass on it. This area is north of the Opéra and can be reached by public transportation. It is beginning to be known for its shops of up-and-coming designers. Check out the passage Thiaffait, rue St-Polycarpe, and place des Terreaux.

FDR/THE 6TH Lyon does have arrondissements like Paris; I'll take the 6e. I came to know the 6e only because I had to have a taste at the famous chocolatier **Bernachon,** located on the cours Franklin Roosevelt (no. 42). How was I to know that this street is a main thoroughfare in a rich little nook of Lyon with several designer boutiques as well as a branch of **Souleiado** (no. 54), just an éclair's throw away from Bernachon? Note that cours Franklin Roosevelt changes its name to cours Vitton. Therefore, the **Lacoste** shop, which is only a block from Souleiado, is located at 1 cours Vitton. You can take the Métro to this area.

PART-DIEU It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a train station, it's a mall, and it's even the home of Les Halles—the indoor food markets of Lyon. This isn't a cute area—it's all tall buildings and modern urban renewal—but there are sidewalks and buses, and you can easily find your way to many good things to eat and take home.

TETE D'OR This area is where the **Cité des Antiquaires** is located—it's technically called Villeurbanne. ***Warning:*** You will never find a cab when you are ready to leave, and there isn't much in terms of public transportation. You can walk over to the Museum of Contemporary Art and maybe find a taxi, call **Allo Taxi** (✆ **04-78-28-23-23**) for one, or try taking bus no. 59 or 70.

FINDS

CASANOVA
56 cours Franklin Roosevelt.

This is an old-fashioned leather and saddle shop in the 6e, the likes of which are not often seen in this century. It sells luggage and handbags, as well as everything else you and your horse may need.

COTELAC
6 rue Emile Zola, Presqu'île; 18 rue Auguste Comte, Presqu'île

Cotélac is a multiple that has stores in Paris as well. It's somewhat unique and special—the clothes are hip and a tad whimsical.

JAYMES
25 rue de Brest, Presqu'île.

Jaymes is a jobber that sells big-name clothing and lingerie and all sorts of things from nearby French mills. The store is stocked with men's, women's, and children's clothing; it's especially packed with fabulous and otherwise very expensive baby and toddler clothes from some of the best French brands. You may or may not find leather goods, towels, bathrobes, and other treats. You just never know.

LES HALLES DE LYON
102 cours Lafayette.

This indoor food hall in the 3e is neither old-fashioned nor quaint, but if you're a fan of food markets, you will have a great time picking and choosing from the local specialties. Note that it's not the most exciting food market in the world, so if you are of the school of seen-one-sausage-seen-'em-all, you will not be knocked out. Les Halles is not far from Part-Dieu and can be reached by public transportation.

Nature Decouvertes
58 rue de la République, Presqu'île.

This is the French branch of the Nature Company. There is one in Paris, in the Carroussel du Louvre, so you do not need to jump on a train and come all the way to Lyon just for this store. However, if you have never seen one, it is a total joy, especially if you are familiar with the American cousin. There are lots of inexpensive gifts and great gadgets for kids.

Lyon Resources A–Z

Big Names & Brands

What follows are some of the big designer boutiques and trendy multiples in Lyon.

Anne Fontaine
49 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

Bernardaud
15 rue des Archers, Presqu'île.

Christian Dior
87 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

Diesel
29 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

Etam
67 rue de la République, Presqu'île.

Façonnable
30 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

Lilith
3 rue des Archers, Presqu'île.

Longchamp
32 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

Max Mara
85 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

MUJI
29 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

PLEIN SUD
8 rue des Archers, Presqu'île.

PUMA
38 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

SEPHORA
66 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

SONIA RYKIEL
62 rue de Brest, Presqu'île.

TARA JARMON
10 rue des Archers, Presqu'île.

VENTILO
42 rue de Brest, Presqu'île.

ZAPA
49 rue Edouard Herriot, Presqu'île.

BOOKS & MUSIC

FNAC
Rue de la République, Presqu'île.

This branch has three floors of books (including some in foreign languages), music, computer gadgets, and tickets to events all over France.

CHOCOLATES & FOODSTUFFS

BERNACHON
42 cours Franklin Roosevelt.

This chocolatier in the 6e is the most famous in town. The éclairs are worth 9 hours on a plane—better than sex. Looking for a great gift for a fellow foodie? You can get 500 grams of cacao here for about 8.70€ ($10).

Les Halles de Lyon
102 cours Lafayette.

See p. 122.

Malleval
11 rue Emile Zola, Presqu'île.

In Lyon since 1860, Malleval is known as a purveyor of gourmet foodstuffs, wine, and champagne.

Monoprix
33 rue de la République, Presqu'île.

This Monoprix has a grocery store that's a good enough resource for food items, picnics, and edible gifts.

Department Stores

Au Printemps
42 place de la République, Presqu'île.

Right in the heart of downtown, next to the place des Jacobins, this is the department store you want, where you want it.

Galeries Lafayette
6 place des Cordeliers, Presqu'île; C C Part-Dieu, 6e.

There are two Galeries Lafayette stores: one a few blocks from the main shopping streets on Presqu'île, and the other inside the mall at the Part-Dieu train station. The downtown branch is nice enough if slightly off the beaten track, right near the river—you have to look for it.

Monoprix Grand Bazaar
31 rue de la République, Presqu'île.

This is one of the strangest sights in French retailing: The storefront looks like a regular department store, named Grand Bazaar, which it must have been at one time. From the outside,

it's quite dramatic. Inside, however, it's rather ordinary. It does have several levels, so it pays to poke around a bit. This is where I found Provençal-style contact paper in the housewares department. There's a grocery store, too.

Discounters

Eurodif
43 rue de Grenette, Presqu'île.

This is a branch of Bouchara and one of the famous discount clothing stores in France. The best buys are teen-style hot fashions and accessories.

Jaymes
25 rue de Brest, Presqu'île.

See p. 122.

Hair & Beauty

Christine Margossian Centre de Beaute
9 rue Grolée, Presqu'île.

This is not only a beauty salon for hair, makeup, and treatments, but also a well-being center that offers the latest in French cures. It's near the Grand Hôtel Boscolo and is one of the fanciest salons in town.

Euro Sante Beaute
Place de la République, Presqu'île.

This French chain of *parapharmacies* (large discount drugstores) has an excellent selection of pharmaceutical brands and good prices. It's right near the center of town, on the side of the main place.

Markets & Fairs

There's a very nice—though rather simple—daily fresh-food market that stretches along the quay side of the Saône at *quai*

St-Antoine. Weekends are heavenly: The colors are beautiful, and some of the regional produce is unique. This market is thin on weekdays, though, and doesn't have as much energy as I would like. Foodies like to visit in the early hours, with hopes of spying one of the area's famous chefs. There is also an indoor market on *quai* Tilsitt.

The regular weekend *brocante* market, **Puces de Canal,** is held on the canal. This is in the middle of nowhere, and you might be frightened on first approach. Please don't fret—it's fab. The market is very funky, with an indoor part and an outdoor part and lots of tag-sale types of vendors and tables. It's a local market superb for buyers and market sophisticates. However, if you speak no French and like your markets sugar-coated, this might not be for you. It's open Sunday (the best day, with 400 dealers) from 6am to 1pm; Thursday and Saturday (when there are only 60 dealers) from 8am to noon. You can get here via bus no. 37 or 7.

Cité des Antiquaires, 117 bd. Stalingrad (✆ **04-72-44-91-98**), is very clean, neat, and upmarket. The architecture is a little strange, and the design of the building may lead you to think it is closed. It has clean bathrooms and a good selection of shops, though most are fancy. This is just past the Tête d'Or park and a little out of the way from other shopping. It's open on Sundays until 1pm.

Saturday and Sunday are the best days for old papers and books along the *quai* des Bookinistes, on the left bank of the Saône, where about 20 book and ephemera dealers open their stalls. A few dealers are open during the week, but most of the action is on weekends.

On Sunday from 8am to 1pm, there's a crafts fair on *quai* Romain Rolland, which is in the heart of Old Lyon along the Saône. I find it sort of like your average high-school bazaar with paintings, sculpture, and the usual suspects—but it's still fun. And it's right across the bridge from the book, fruit, flower, and veggie markets—so all in all, do 'em and enjoy the day out.

Every June (usually the third weekend), there's a giant antiques salon, the **Brocante du Vieux Lyon.** And on the first

Thursday of October, the antiques shops on rue Auguste Comte hold open house until 11pm.

The nouveau Beaujolais is released at midnight on the third Wednesday in November. People all over France get together to drink and celebrate, but the goings-on are particularly festive in Lyon.

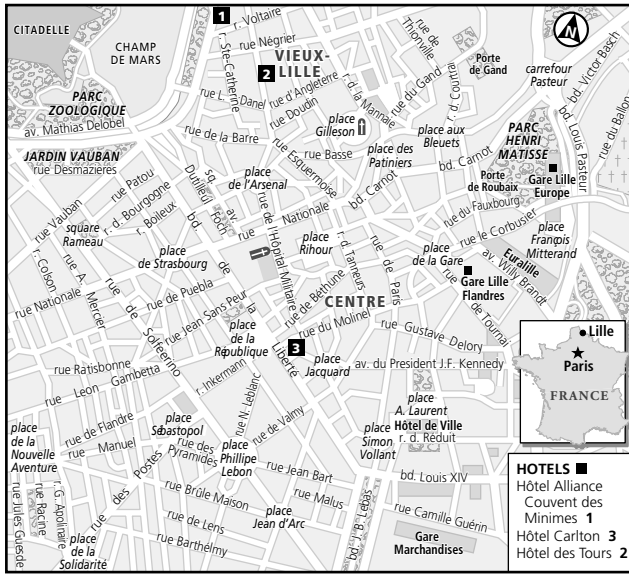
LILLE

And now to bed. In Lille. After all, Lille is famous as the heartland of French bed linen, the home of Porthault and Descamps, and the address for zillions of outlet stores.

It is also the capital city of northern France, and it turned around to new celebrations of life, art, and tourists when the Eurostar picked Lille as its turnaround city. Trains through the Chunnel all connect in Lille—they turn right to go to Paris and left to go to Brussels. Furthermore, there are whispers that the mayor of Lille wants to be president of France, so she's making sure that everything's up-to-date and working great.

Lille has a kind of architecture you won't see in many other French cities: It has a lot in common with Brussels and gives you more than a little chance to think about the cultural differences between the French and the Flemish. Traditionally speaking, because of the manufacturing, Lille and the rest of the north have been rich cities, and locals have not been shy about showing off their wealth. The architecture here is embellished and even the middle class is into designer clothing. The beer is good, the food flavorful, and the shopping simply super.

Also note that, culturally speaking, Lille is no backwater factory town. In 2004, the city (and surrounding area) became the European City of Culture. The people of Lille not only painted the town red to celebrate, but also turned the inside of the train station pink. Lille has tons of energy and many arts programs in theaters, in opera houses, and even on the street; it also represents a large metro area with villages that actually stretch across the border into Belgium.



Location, Location, Location

Lille is a mere 10 minutes from the Belgian border and a short distance from Calais. It's slightly northeast of Paris and directly north of Reims. It is equidistant to both Antwerp and Brussels. Thanks to this location, and the connections created by the Eurostar, TGV, and Thalys trains, Lille is one of the most international cities in Europe, with 100 million European citizens living within a 320km (200-mile) radius of the city. Because of the proximity of the U.K., many of them speak English. However, few American tourists visit Lille.

Getting to Lille

If you're coming from Paris, you do not take the Eurostar to Lille. This train takes on passengers, *but does not allow them to disembark*. Instead, take the **Thalys** train, also from Gare du Nord. There are discounted TGV train tickets for a day of

shopping from Paris to Lille in the Pret-à-Partir group of promotions. The train ride from Paris to Lille is 1 hour.

If you want to drive (not a bad idea), it takes about 2½ hours from the north of Paris to Lille. If you want to do the factory outlets, it's better to have a car. Getting into Lille itself is easy; expect to get lost once you start looking for the outlets.

The Lay of the Land

Like Lyon, Lille is an enormous city with a great spread and many suburbs. If you're on a day trip, you probably won't get to know these suburbs; if you have a car and get to outlets, you'll soon know many of the names of the nearby towns.

The heart of Old Lille (Vieux Lille) is rather small, is easily walked, and can be enjoyed in hours—just be sure you look at all the buildings and their pretty colors before you start licking the store windows.

The center of Lille (a short walk from Old Lille) is the Grand Place, and the nearby Old Bourse is a must-see for its architecture. Don't miss the book market, with its shortcut into the heart of the shopping district in Vieux Lille. Because of the medieval nature of the city, it takes a little longer to get your bearings in the old part of Lille. I suggest repeated shopping forays and patience with a map. I have often been delightfully lost.

The old (pre-Eurostar) train station is named **Gare Lille Flandres;** it forms the end of the shopping and central downtown district at one side of town. If you have a choice of train stations for your visit, arrive at this one. Take a nice hard look at the train station—it happens to be an old friend. It was moved, brick by brick, from Paris, where it originally housed the Gare du Nord, the connecting link from Paris to Lille. The pink ceiling will be painted out eventually.

From the Grand Place, numerous streets form the spokes of retail: The big chains (even the **Disney Store**) are on rue Neuve, while the department stores (including a good branch of **Au Printemps**) are on rue Nationale. You can take other spokes

from the Grand Place, such as rue de la Grand Chaussée, toward the place du Lion d'Or to get deeper into the little medieval streets and hit some of the linen stores.

Away from the center of town, but not far from the original train station, is a double-header: an American-style mall (**Centre Euralille**) and, a block away, the "big" train station built for the arrival of Eurostar, **Gare Lille Europe** (which is noted as *LE* on train schedules). This station is in a contemporary building that's not at all old-fashioned or charming.

Outside town are endless suburbs and connecting cities—more than 100 of them in the metro area. Shoppers will want to remember (even if they can't pronounce) **Wazemmes,** the site of the Sunday-morning flea market. (You can get there on the Métro.) **Roubaix** is a neighboring town, now being renovated; it's home to many outlet stores (and a museum in a swimming pool).

Getting Around Lille

You can do the city center on foot. If you want to give up treks to Porthault and big-time outlets and just go to the outlet mall in Roubaix, you can take public transportation or make a deal with a taxi driver to drop you off and pick you up a few hours (or weeks) later. If you've come to Lille with a car, you'd do best to park in pay lots. Street parking is hard to find.

Sleeping in Lille

Hotel Alliance Couvent des Minimes

17 quai du Wault.

This four-star hotel, now a member of the Golden Tulip chain, was created from a 12th-century convent. The architecture is grand and the space comfortable enough, though neither glam nor deluxe. It's about a 5-minute walk to the Grand Place. The hotel has 91 units and a restaurant in the cloister; rates are about 125€ ($144) per night, including buffet breakfast. Local phone ✆ **03-20-30-62-62.** Fax 03-20-42-94-25.

HOTEL CARLTON
3 rue de Paris.

The Carlton has been spruced up and offers a fabulous location, a block from the Grand Place and within walking distance of all the shopping. This four-star hotel is small and not chic or fancy, but it's considered one of the nicest in town. (Johnny Hallyday stays here.)

Rates vary by time of year and promotion; expect to pay from 200€ ($230) on up. The Carlton participates in the two-for-one weekend deal. For dollar rates and promotional deals, call Concorde in the U.S. at ✆ **800/888-4747.** Local phone ✆ 03-20-13-33-13. Fax 03-20-51-48-17. www.concorde-hotels.com.

HOTEL DES TOURS
27 rue des Tours.

If you're fine with three stars, then you'll like this hotel—it has a fabulous location in the heart of Old Town. The property is new; everything is clean, modern, and low-key; and there are mezzanine rooms for families. Rates are about 100€ ($115). Local phone ✆ **03-59-57-47-00.** Fax 03-59-57-47-99. www.hotel-des-tours.com.

Eating in Lille

You'll have no trouble finding cafes and other places to snack and shop—waffles and *frites* (fries) are sold in stands on the streets and in shopping areas, including the factory outlets at Roubaix. In cafes, try local dishes made with a Flemish touch or cooked in Belgian beer.

LE COQ HARDI
44 Grand Place.

This is one of the many cafes on the Grand Place. I like the prices (low), the food (excellent), the regional-style cooking (like that smelly cheese tart), and the location in the heart of everything. Employees here speak English.

L'Huitriere
Rue des Chats Bossus and rue Basse.

This is a very fancy Michelin-starred restaurant and grocery store in the medieval part of town, not far from the place du Lion d'Or. The specialty here is oysters. Don't miss the decorative tiles outside or the decorative touches inside.

Meert
27 rue Esquermoise.

This traditional old-fashioned tearoom for waffles, pastries, chocolates, and the like was established in 1761.

Paul
8 rue de Paris.

Paul is a national chain with many cutie-pie locations around France, but this is where it all began. The flagship cafe is a must-do, and because it's across the street from Hôtel Carlton and in the center of town, it should be an easy assignment. Paul also runs the cafe in the Palais des Beaux Arts, which is fine and nice, but don't miss the attractive sit-down opportunity in town, with wooden beams, tiles, charm, and good stuff to eat any time of the day. It's open daily from 6:30am to midnight.

Shopping in Lille

Lille sees few American visitors, and while it does have a strong tourist business among Brits and other Europeans, the shopping style is very real-people oriented. The outlets are mobbed by both locals and visitors, and locals traditionally make the rounds at their off-price resources once a month or whenever possible, since outlet shopping can be so hit or miss.

There are a few local chains and jobbers that have branches only in northern France. My favorite find is **Fantastik,** a jobber right off the Grand Place that has designer goods being dumped at low, low prices.

Lille also has a blend of established designer names (**Hermès, Lancel,** and so on), new-to-me names, and French multiples and outlet stores. In Old Town, a good bit of the retail is hidden in plain sight—most stores don't have numbers posted, and the streets wind around in an adorable fashion that makes shopping here a treasure hunt. Everything you could want is right within walking distance, allowing you to wander the cute and charming streets.

OUTLETS

There are a lot of outlet stores and many malls in the Lille area, stretching from town all the way to the sea and Calais. If you want to get to some of the outlets, I suggest you have a plan of attack—work with a map and form a basic schedule—before you come to town. Outlet shopping requires a lot of juggling and a good amount of driving, depending on how many stores you're hitting, so start with a basic plan and then be somewhat flexible. Any French bookstore sells guidebooks to the outlets.

On most of my trips to Lille, the Porthault factory—about an hour's drive from downtown Lille—is my number-one priority. Because it is so off the beaten track from everything else, all my plans have to be coordinated with this trip. If you're driving from Paris, this outlet is midway between Paris and Lille, so it makes a great first stop.

Note: I've found that after a certain number of outlets, I begin to crack up. Make your plans based on your known tolerance for this kind of shopping.

In the section "Lille Resources A–Z," below, I've listed the specifics of shopping at those outlets I've personally visited. I found that the opportunities I had more than wiped out my credit rating and my stash of euros. In the end, despite the fact that I had pages of outlet addresses, there wasn't enough time, energy, or money in a weekend to hit much more than Porthault, Old Town, and the big outlet in Roubaix. But there are hundreds of other outlets in the Lille area, so you could spend a month here to shop them all. If you're serious about this pursuit, get one of the outlet books mentioned above.

Markets & Fairs

The Friday edition of the local newspaper has an *On Chine* section listing all nearby flea markets, *brocante* markets, and tag sales.

On the first weekend in September, Lille hosts a giant flea-market street fair called the **Braderie,** which is based on a medieval tradition whereby home owners allowed the servants one day a year to clean out the attic and sell off the master's old junk. Now thousands of vendors line the streets, people eat mussels and drink beer, and they shop way into the night. The market goes on for 24 hours and lasts for 2 to 3 days, so many night owls prefer to shop in the middle of the night. Hotel rooms book up months in advance, so find out the exact dates and book early.

A small antiques and used-book market is held daily in the courtyard of the Old Bourse, right near the Grand Place.

Every Sunday, there's a flea market in the suburb of **Wazemmes,** at place de la Nouvelle Aventure. This one is a winner. ***Important note:*** To get here, take the Métro from Rihour (downtown) in the Wazemmes direction—but get off at Gambetta. Do *not* get off at Wazemmes.

Because of Lille's location, there are many organized tours that go to flea markets, art markets, and the like. People think nothing of a day trip to the United Kingdom, even all the way to London, or a trip to Maastricht or Bruges or Brussels (which is a great market town). There are even Christmas markets in Germany to think about—you can take an all-day tour to the Christmas market in Cologne. There are also some organized tours to outlets. Ask at the tourist office, 6 place Mendès France, for details.

Shopping Hours

Regular stores in Lille open at 9 or 9:30am, close for lunch, and reopen at 2 or 2:30pm. Some stores open at 10am and stay open all day until 7 or 7:30pm. Stores in Lille are closed on Sunday. Many are also closed Monday morning, but open at 2pm.

Factory hours are different and often specific to the factory; check before you drive out of the way. Factories and outlets stay open on Monday mornings.

Shopping Neighborhoods

For years, I found Lille difficult to grasp—it's not on a grid system, and I have trouble with medieval streets that interconnect and sometimes change names. In the city, you can pretty much wander, get lost, be found, and have a great shopping day. Just head for the Grand Place.

GRAND PLACE Like every Grand Place, this one has stores, cafes, banks, and everything else you want from a Grand Place. You'll see a branch of **FNAC,** a **Sephora,** and my discount jobber favorite, **Fantastik.**

RUE NATIONALE This spoke from the Grand Place is home to **Au Printemps** and the big commercial stores. Au Printemps has been renovated and prices are often given in both euros and sterling; it offers a tax-back plan and a tourist discount card.

RUE NEUVE This spoke from the Grand Place has many real-people stores, such as **Pro Mod, Electre,** and **Pimkie;** it's sort of the teen and tween shopping area.

RUE FAIDHERBE This is the main street through the center of town, leading from the core of town directly to the Flandres train station. There's a large branch of **Tati,** the discounter.

RUE PARIS This spoke from Grand Place runs next to Faidherbe and is the street where the Hôtel Carlton is located, so it will help you get your bearings. There's more shopping as you head away from town on rue Paris.

PLACE DU GENERAL DE GAULLE Yes, de Gaulle was born in Lille. This area adjoins the Grand Place, leads into Old Town, and signifies the beginning of the fancy shopping district. Look for the **Lancel** shop at the edge of the Grand Place and then follow your nose (that's a de Gaulle joke, get it?).

VIEUX LILLE (OLD TOWN) From the place du Lion d'Or, check out the rue de la Monnaie for vintage shops and other nice clothing, shoe, and home-design stores (owned by those who couldn't quite pay the higher rents a block away). Then cut back around the Cathedral Nôtre Dame de la Treille for more backstreets with a few jobbers and some antiques shops. The streets run together here and don't really need names. This is a pedestrian-only area located behind the Grand Place between rue Esquermoise and boulevard Carnot (though not including Carnot). You'll find C&A, Camaieu, NafNaf, Zara, and more. The best shopping streets in the Old Town are rue Esquermoise, rue des Chats Bossus, rue du Curé St-Etienne, and rue Basse.

Lille Resources A–Z

Antiques

The part of town with the most antiques shops is right near the Cathedral Nôtre Dame de la Treille, although I did not go nuts for antiques in these stores. Better to wait for the flea market on Sundays or the Braderie in September.

Bath & Beauty

Marionnaud
Grand Place.

This is a chain of beauty and perfume stores organized by a Frenchman to compete with Sephora; it's not as fancy as Sephora, and the prices and selection are a little more middle-class in order to appeal to locals rather than tourists.

Nous Savons Tout
45 rue Esquermoise.

And you didn't know the French had a sense of humor? The name of this soap store takes the cake, as far as I'm concerned. It's also a fun shop filled with a variety of bath products.

SEPHORA
Grand Place.

This is not the largest Sephora you will ever see, but it's still a perfectly good example of the beauty supermarket that has become an international chain and shopping icon. It carries everything from designer products to some U.S. brands to its own line to dime-store brands to professional makeup to animal-shaped bath beads. If you meet the *détaxe* requirement, the discount will be applied to your purchase immediately.

BIG NAMES

In Old Town, you can find most of the world's big names: Anne Fontaine, Cartier, Façonnable, Gerard Darel, Hermès, Kenzo Homme, Lancel, Laura Ashley, Longchamp, Sonia Rykiel, Versace Jeans, and Zara. Remember that most Lille stores don't have numbers posted and the Old Town streets wind around—you'll have to hunt around.

CHEESE & OTHER FOODSTUFFS

AUX BONS FROMAGES
13 rue du Curé St-Etienne.

This shop specializes in cheeses from the northern parts of France.

LES BONS PATURAGES
54 rue Basse.

Totally different in feel from Philippe Oliver (see below), this is almost a cute deli-style store with some ready-made food along with wine and cheese. The food items are mostly cheese-based.

PHILIPPE OLIVER
3 rue Curé St-Etienne.

This small but well-known cheese shop also makes the regional specialty, *Flamiche au Maroilles,* which I call the smelly cheese tart. If you're a fan of strongly flavored (and scented) cheese, this is a winner.

Department Stores

Au Printemps
45 rue Nationale.

This branch of the Paris-based department store is large, well stocked, and chic—a pleasure to shop. There's a 10% discount offered at the Welcome Desk (just show your passport) and an additional 12% tax-back refund if you spend 175€ ($201) in the store in a single day.

Tati
Rue Faidherbe.

There are two different Tati stores next door to each other, so don't miss any of it, if you can cope with bins of junk piled high.

Discounters

Eurodif
Rue de la Bourse.

I never know if I should call Eurodif a discounter or a department store; technically, it probably isn't a discounter—it just seems like one to me. This is a fit-all-your-needs multi-level store that sells great stuff (clothes, home style, gifts) for not much money. Eurodif is owned by Bouchara; in most stores, the wares are combined under one roof—only in Paris are they two different resources. This shop stays open on Mondays and during lunch.

Fantastik
Place de la République.

This store will not appeal to the tender shopper. It truly is just bins and bins of stuff, everything all very hit or miss. There are three floors of merchandise, and although it's organized into men's, women's, kids and teens, and home, you do have to poke around. My best find? Designer sunglasses for 8.70€ ($10).

PASS BY COLETTE

2 rue St-Jacques, place du Lion d'Or.

This fancy store in the heart of Old Town sells mostly overstock. The clothes are new, not used; they come from every big designer name in France and Italy; and they have a colorful and sometimes ethnic feel. Closed Sunday and Monday.

FACTORY OUTLETS

BELGRAND

20 av. de Dunkerque, Cambrai.

This is a large Rodier outlet that sells men's and women's things as well as accessories. The prices are low, but the real giveaways are the sale items—they often go for 10€ ($12) per piece. Belgrand is about 5 minutes from the Porthault factory; you will pass it automatically. The phone number is ✆ **03-27-72-72-77.** Hours are Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to 6:30pm. In July and August, the store is closed on Mondays.

MAGASINS D'USINE

228 av. Alfred Motte, Roubaix.

Rather yucky, crowded, hard to shop, devoid of charm, and a jumble of fun if you like this kind of thing. I do; most don't. It's mobbed on Saturdays and a parking space is always hard to find. You can take public transportation to Roubaix and then a taxi to get here, but you won't think it's worth it. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 7pm.

MARQUES AVENUE COTE D'OPALE

Bd. du Parc, Coquelles.

This new 80-store outlet mall is not worth the extra drive from Lille, but if you're in the Calais area anyway, you can make a stop. Marques Avenue has very smartly put itself right near the mouth of Le Shuttle, the tunnel for vehicular traffic to the U.K. From Lille, the beach is about 30 minutes north of

the city. If you're coming from Calais, you can get here by bus, train, or car (take the A16 autoroute to exit 12). Closed Sundays. For more information, go to www.marquesavenue.com.

McArthur Glen

44 mail de Lannoy, Roubaix.

This American-style outlet mall in the heart of downtown Roubaix is the stuff of retail legends. I would write a dissertation on it if I ever got my official degree in shopping. The mall is built right on city streets as part of an urban reclamation project. It is not the best outlet center in Lille, but it has plenty of name brands and is both easy to get to and easy to shop. Lacoste, Nitya, Adidas, Nike, and Leonard (glass and tabletop) all have stores here, as do some of the bed-linen people. (The best of the linen outlets is **Sous-Signe,** which has branches both here and at L'Usine.) Parking is located underground. The area has been cleaned up enormously, and the mall is the heart of it all. You can get here easily and directly from Lille by tram or Métro—get off at the Eurotéléport stop. Closed Sundays.

Porthault

19 rue Robespierre, Rieux-en-Cambrésis.

The Porthault factory is about an hour outside Lille; it's not hard to get to, but if you drive, you should be used to driving in France. It is in the middle of nowhere, and you might lose heart while driving because the factory itself is not marked. You should speak some French and have a phone or phone card on you so that if you do get lost, you can call the factory for directions.

What's available in terms of selection is very hit or miss. Prices are laughably low, running from 10% to 50% of the regular retail price. I think the pillowcases are the best buy, but I have also stocked up on robes, towels, baby gifts, and even *gant de toilette.*

Porthault accepts credit cards and has a toilet you can use. If you get there and the outlet—which is in a gatehouse—is closed, go to the offices and ask them to open up for you. Also ask to get on the mailing list, and you'll be notified of the dates of the outlet sales. Hours are Monday through Thursday from 10am to noon and 1 to 4:30pm. Closed in August.

Here are basic directions: Head south from Lille on Autoroute du Nord, A1. Connect to N43 in the direction of Cambrai. In Cambrai, take N44 to the left for Rieux-en-Cambrésis. You will not notice that this is a factory or that it is Porthault, as it's unmarked. Look for the factory chimney and the ironwork at the gates. Drive into the tiny courtyard and park. At the reception desk, ask to visit the shop. Expect to get lost. I recommend calling ahead (✆ **03-27-82-22-33**) and telling them when you're coming.

FINDS

N DE B
6 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

This local hatmaker is the fabulous, creative winner of many national design prizes. The N is for the first name of the creator, Nathalie Sarazin. Closed Mondays.

TERRE DE BRUYERE
39 rue Lepelletier.

This shop has a mother store in Paris's 6e, but it is not well known, even in Paris. The specialty is fashion handbags made like fishing or hunting bags. It's a weekendy look that is chic and sophisticated yet casual. Bags are very well made; prices begin around 160€ ($184).

HOME STYLE

Lille has many stores devoted to home style; more and more seem to open all the time. All major brands of furniture are here, as are the mass-market linen stores and linen outlets.

Because of the proximity of Great Britain, the English look is very popular. Still, don't miss the **Flamart** shop for a study in French country chic that's both glam and comfy. You'll find high-style but low-cost items at **Bouchara** and **Eurodif.**

Le Prince Jardinier, 66 rue Esquermoise, has expanded from Paris for tabletop, furniture, gifts, and garden/outdoor decorative items. **Geneviève Lethu** is on the same street (no. 84).

Malls

Euralille
Av. le Corbusier.

This is a commercial center in the heart of downtown; it has a branch of the *hypermarché* (modern dry-goods store) **Carrefour** (which opens at 9am) and many other major multiples and brand stores.

BIARRITZ

Biarritz, which was once enormously chic (its heyday was 1890–1930), has been rediscovered by American tourists, many of whom come to see the surrounding Pays Basque—the French and Spanish Basque country and the Frank Gehry–designed Guggenheim museum in Bilbao.

Meanwhile, the British are flying directly from the U.K. and bypassing the rest of France, as if Biarritz were their own personal secret. You can also fly between Paris and Bilbao.

The sprawl of beach and splendor leading from Spain into France has always been known to local aristocracy and royalty, but never really made it to the American tourist agenda—until now. With its famous surf, many promotional events, some world-class hotels with treatment and therapy centers, and the proximity of the Guggenheim, Biarritz is becoming more of a must-do. To Americans, this is a neighborhood that might as well be called Biarritz-Bilbao; they come not for the textiles but for the art and a chance to see Jeff Koons's *Puppy.*

Although Biarritz was put on the map when Napoléon III built his Spanish empress a summerhouse here, what the world doesn't remember is that Biarritz was firmly located on the medieval pilgrim path to Santiago de Compostela. This prime location certainly meant something to the Empress Eugénie, and it also means a lot now, in terms of the centuries of culture and trade that have followed the path you are about to explore.

Biarritz isn't really in the middle of nowhere. It's been in the middle of somewhere since, well, the Middle Ages. Santiago de Compostela is one of the most special places in the world, and while it's a bit far to be considered a day trip from Biarritz, it is part of the hidden layers of secrets that await you in this corner of both Spain and France.

Because of the Schengen Convention laws, the border between Spain and France has "disappeared." You can cross without your passport—no stopping at immigration. In fact, the immigration stalls have been abandoned. *Vaya conmigo.*

Basque Style

Southwestern France has a warm Spanish country tradition. The colors move away from the dark blues associated with seafaring design or the warm blues associated with the Mediterranean and into yellows, golds, and baked earth tones. The fishing influence is found, of course, in everything from espadrilles to striped T-shirts. Think Picasso.

Those espadrilles, berets, and Basque linens are three of the most important stylistic ingredients that have come from the Basque region, where flax and wool have been grown for centuries. They have permeated not only French style but also international chic. If the Pink Panther wears a beret to signify that he's French, it's because the beret has become a virtual visual signature for the Frenchman—despite the fact that few people in Paris wear berets.

Despite globalization and even the unification of nations, most European countries are in their hearts still regions or fiefdoms. To the French, Provence and the Côte d'Azur are nice, but expensive and touristy. In the meantime, southwestern

chic has become the new regional style for home and table. The pottery manufacturer Poc à Poc sells a look it calls *l'esprit Catalan*. There's a whole new kind of French design here for you to start shopping for . . . along with a new way of eating and cooking.

Basque Linen 101

For centuries, the agricultural area stretching from Aquitaine north to the Basque country has been linen-producing land. The Basque-style linens have a famed and specific look, available in traditional or contemporary forms (contemporary is a color concept; the style never changes).

The linens are either natural (sort of beige-y) or white (bleached white), and lined with stripes. The number of stripes, the width of the stripes, and the color of the stripes are the variable factors. If you think, *yawn,* stripes, you are so wrong—even the simplest stripes represent a very pure chic, while the bolder designs are almost all colored stripes with little white in between.

Getting to Biarritz

From Paris, you can either fly or take the train (TGV service from Gare Montparnasse). There are 14 trains a day; note that it's a rather long schlep (about 5 hr.). But wait! Here's the big news: The discount airline **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) flies from London-Stansted to Biarritz-Parme. The airport will have expanded by 2007; all major carriers are expected then.

I once drove to Biarritz from Cannes, by way of Provence. It's a long drive from the Riviera; do not make the mistake of thinking you can do it in a day or that France is a small country. When you're driving east to west, you'll find that France is a big country with small roads.

The Lay of the Land

Biarritz has always been a resort city, a place for royalty and aristocrats. It's situated at the edge of the rocky Atlantic coast, and although there is a big, beautiful beach, what makes Biarritz so

magical are the ragged edges of the rocks, the pounding of the sea, and the rugged land. The Riviera stands for calm seas; Biarritz, in contrast, is all energy and waves.

Many of the people who work in Biarritz live in Bayonne, which is a few miles away. Some of the goods sold in Biarritz are also sold here, at much lower prices. Biarritz is also near the coastal fishing village of St-Jean-de-Luz, which makes a lovely outing. It's not far from the Spanish border, and it's an easy day trip to San Sebastian or Bilbao.

Centre ville in Biarritz has a surprising number of neighborhoods; this is not the one-lane town you might expect. The city has layers and levels, and the main street winds down to the sea. This city was designed for the promenade, so you'll find plenty of wide sidewalks to browse.

You have to love any town that has a big Hermès sign on top of a biscuit-colored stucco villa, a town where you can turn a blind corner and suddenly see the sea shining between the buildings or the enormous wrought-iron gates at the foot of the shopping street. The gates welcome you to the Hôtel du Palais and a town of incredible glamour.

Getting Around Biarritz

Biarritz is easily walked; the Hôtel du Palais is right in the heart of things.

To get to the nearby villages (or Spain), you'll need a car. There is an autoroute, so driving is relatively easy. There is no formal border with Spain.

Sleeping in Biarritz

HOTEL DU PALAIS

1 av. de l'Impératrice.

You can actually afford the fanciest hotel in France! Because Biarritz is a little away from the swing of things, prices—even for the grandest of life's little dreams—are moderate, and lower than at comparable hotels in Paris, the Riviera, or

Provence. Although this hotel was created out of a palace (hence the name), it has been renovated; an enormous new spa is set to open sometime in 2005.

The Hôtel du Palais isn't inexpensive, but if you consider the fact that you're sleeping in the private home of the emperor and his empress, with the ocean outside your window, and in the resort town that ends all questions about chic, then you actually have a bargain. The average rate in season is 250€ ($288). For all available rates in dollars, call Concorde in the U.S. at ✆ **800/888-4747.** Local phone ✆ 05-59-41-64-00. www.hotel-du-palais.com.

Treatments in Biarritz

It's not unusual for a couple to sign up for a *forfait* (package) that includes hotel, meals, and treatments at any of the *thalassotherapie* (seawater-related spa treatments) centers in Biarritz. More and more men enjoy these treatments, and the weekend, long-weekend, or 1-week cures for "well being" are common (and sometimes paid for by French health care). Sofitel has an entire division of treatment centers, including one in Biarritz. The Hôtel du Palais hopes to knock the world on its hotel slippers with the opening of its new spa in 2005.

Shopping in Biarritz

Biarritz is an unusual town for shoppers. There are plenty of stores and lots of places to roam, because being out and about is part of the local etiquette. Most of the interesting shops are related to foodstuffs or candy or linens. There are some designer shops, but not an overwhelming number. There are no big malls or commercial centers, especially downtown. It's a very low-key kind of place.

You will find a small business in antiques, with shops scattered here and there; a few discount stores (one resale shop, one shop for clothes without their labels), in the main part of downtown; and a very good bookstore. There's a nice New

England feel to the shopping, but there's no pressure to buy and no pressure to be incredibly chic, like on the Riviera. The look is very much jeans, espadrilles, blazers, and Hermès scarves. And very good jewelry. In fact, Harry Winston just opened a new store here.

SHOPPING NEIGHBORHOODS

PALAIS Along the avenue de la Reine Victoria, there are shops on both the left- and right-hand sides. There are more stores on the avenue de l'Impératrice, such as **Cerrutti 1881** and **Alain Figaret,** which is well known to the French for men's ties with a certain type of silk design. Alain Figaret is also known for his dress shirts for both men and women. As you leave Palais and head toward the high street, you'll see more designer shops, like **Sonia Rykiel.**

THE HIGH STREET: AVENUE EDOUARD VII If you didn't know better, you would think this was the only main drag in town. It's where the branches of the big names (such as Hermès) are located. It leads to the place Clemenceau and the center of town, which is anchored by the department store **Nouvelles Galeries,** which has a supermarket in its basement. If you're driving across France, or simply spending time between Biarritz and Bordeaux, this could be your last convenient time to do French grocery shopping, so load up now.

HIDDEN HIGH STREET: RUE GAMBETTA Who would have thunk it? Biarritz has a second high street. This one is not so easily found and is a little more real-people oriented. However, it's laden with enough seaside tourist traps (TTs) and linen shops to make you glad you came on down.

REAL-PEOPLE UPTOWN Leading in and out of town is yet another high street, avenue du Maréchal Foch, which has more shops for real people and a tiny strip mall that houses a few multiples such as Rodier and Cacharel. There's also a *marché* (market) for everyday, plus more food and gourmet shops one street over, on avenue Victor Hugo—including two

that are mentioned by foodies the world over: Mille et Un Fromage (no. 8) and Maison Arosteguy (no. 5).

Finds

Au Buffle d'Eau
8 av. Edouard VII.

I think the name of this shop is a pun in French, although none of the leather goods here seem to actually be made from buffalo. They're put together with such elegant style that you won't be able to sleep at night until you've conquered the large-size Kelly bag.

Daury
2 av. de la Reine Victoria.

This is resort chic at its best: the kind of store that sells beautiful gifts, tabletop designs, and some antiques in such a way as to make you want to move right in. When you get to shop in places like this, where everything is displayed so beautifully, the magic of Biarritz becomes even more real. Whether you buy anything or not, don't miss a trip here. It's almost directly across the street from Hôtel du Palais.

Gotcha
21 rue Mazagran.

Surf's up, dudes. This shop is owned by the area's premier surfer king; my son insisted I give you the address. Teens and tweens hang here—or hang ten here.

Helena
33 rue Mazagran.

One of the many linen stores in Biarritz, this one works for me because its color palette is different—Helena has natural linen, which is beige, trimmed with coral. (Most shops sell a

hard white trimmed with primary colors.) Prices are also rather reasonable; I paid about 65€ ($75) for a gigantic tablecloth. Other products for sale here include bathrobes, slippers, aprons, oven mitts, and all sizes and shapes of table linens. The staff does not speak English, but is very friendly about opening up the linen and spreading it so you can see the true size. Wash your find in cool water the first time so the color doesn't run.

HENRIET
Place Clemenceau.

Henriet is a local status brand. As funky as Pariès is (see below), this store just across the street is both fancy and formal. It sells pastries, homemade chocolates, fruit and nut candies, its own candy bars (great gifts at about 1.75€/$2 each), and adorable little chocolate cakes. The price (about 35€/$40) for a kilo of the califruits isn't bad, considering the quality and the subtext that comes with the gift.

PARIES
27 place Clemenceau.

In a town filled with candy shops, this one stands out as my favorite. Pariès is the maker of a local treat called *kanougas*. For those of you who have tasted your way across France, loosen your belt. A *kanouga* is a regional Basque treat, sort of like fudge-meets-taffy, but not as hard or crunchy as nougat. In fact, it's a gooey flavored caramel. I've gone flat bonkers for the chocolate ones, which are made using the shop owner's family recipe, handed down through the generations.

You can buy *kanougas* in a bag of mixed flavors (the colors of the wrapping paper indicate the different flavors), or you can just buy a kilo of the chocolate and get it over with.

The shop also sells candied fruit rinds, traditional Basque candies, and even *tourons,* which are Spanish-style candy

loaves, cut to suit. Oh yes, you can also get pastries and local *gâteaux,* (cake) as well as macaroons and other yummies, such as homemade black-cherry jam.

Sandales d'Eugenie
18 rue Mazagran.

Be it the Empress Eugénie, Cinderella, or simply a barefoot contessa, these locally made sandals have been the vogue since the 1930s. The stylish, slip-on espadrille styles would cut the mustard or make waves in any city in the world. This is not peasant or resort wear.

Nearby Local Hero

Jean Vier
Route St-Jean-de-Luz.

Be still my greedy heart! How I love this look, and how I would have bet the farm that this would become the next Pierre Deux. I'd have given anything to own a string of shops from this brand in every mall in America. Alas, there are no stores at all. But this is the factory and its outlet store, located between Biarritz and St-Jean-de-Luz.

Traditional Basque linens are sold from the shop. They're not dirt cheap, but they're the best quality in the world and worth the trip to France.

Real-People Shopping

You can visit branches of **Jean Louis David** or **Jacques Dessange** should you need to get your hair done. **Parfumerie Frimousse,** right in the heart of town, sells the basics. **Nouvelles Galeries** is the local branch of Galeries Lafayette; it's a low-end department store that has a grocery store in the basement, and it carries many health and beauty aids you might need. It's also a place for cheap thrills for the kids.

THE SUBURBS & SPAIN

Bayonne

Bayonne is the large city on the other side of the bay from Biarritz; it's where the real people live. The shopping isn't great, but it can be fun and funky. There is a full **Galeries Lafayette** at 23–30 rue Thiers. But I wouldn't drive all the way here just for this department store; besides, Nouvelles Galeries in Biarritz is much the same, only smaller.

St-Jean-de-Luz

This is a small beach community halfway between Biarritz and the border. It will someday be ruined, but for now it's relatively authentic. Sometimes small cruise ships come to call here. If you want to stay overnight, the best choice is town is the **Grand Hôtel** (✆ **05-59-26-35-36;** www.luzgrandhotel.fr), a member of the Concorde chain.

Beyond Those Borders

Since the border stations are deserted or nonexistent, you will breeze into Spain without even sighing about the rain that stays mainly on the plain. Instead, you'll be shocked by the size of San Sebastián (it's not the small fishing village you were expecting) and how much is going on in Bilbao, which was once an industrial wasteland but is now abloom.

Some people make Bilbao a day trip from Biarritz, but you deserve at least an overnight. The city has its own airport, which like many other smaller airports is suddenly getting a lot of flights. Spending the night in Bilbao has gotten a lot more chic—there are scads of new and very artsy hotels, including a **Sheraton** (✆ **34-94-428-0000;** www.sheratonbilbao.com).

Chapter Seven

SHOPPING PROVENCE

WELCOME TO PROVENCE

Most of us think of Provence as a series of tiny villages of postcard perfection, made up of colors like ochre, washed turquoise, burnt umber, and geranium red; home of vines and lavender and more soap suds than you can imagine. True, all of it true, but it's the industrial revolution that connects you to these elements—either the TGV train (3 hr. from Paris to Marseille), a flight into a nearby airport (many low-cost carriers head this way), or a cruise right into the port.

No matter which way you arrive, Marseille and Provence are now at your fingertips; despite the fact that Marseille is a very large city—and may not be on your itinerary—it is the gateway to Provence. The train track from Paris to Marseille is the new spine of Provence.

Avignon is a mere 2½ hours from Paris on the fast train, and Aix is 2 hours and 40 minutes from Paris. Whole new parts of Provence—especially northern Provence and the Drôme—are coming into vogue, partly because of the ease now offered by the train. All of France is doing the foxtrot.

The train itself is also a new icon, with or without its designer decorations by Christian Lacroix—it reduces a long journey to a short one and lays the cornerstone for an international train system that will soon connect to Barcelona and then branch in

all directions to cover the face of Europe, uniting people not only with euros but also with quick-rail train tracks.

Marseille and Provence are so intertwined that they share an airport and a history, going back to Roman times. Actually, the airport does not go back to Roman history, but you get my drift. For this reason, I begin the city listings in this chapter with Marseille and then proceed in alphabetical order.

Getting to Provence

BY PLANE Marseille has a fabulous international airport, so you can fly in from many destinations in Europe as well as from Paris. The Marseille airport lies directly between Marseille and Aix, which is why it is officially named the Marseille–Provence International Airport.

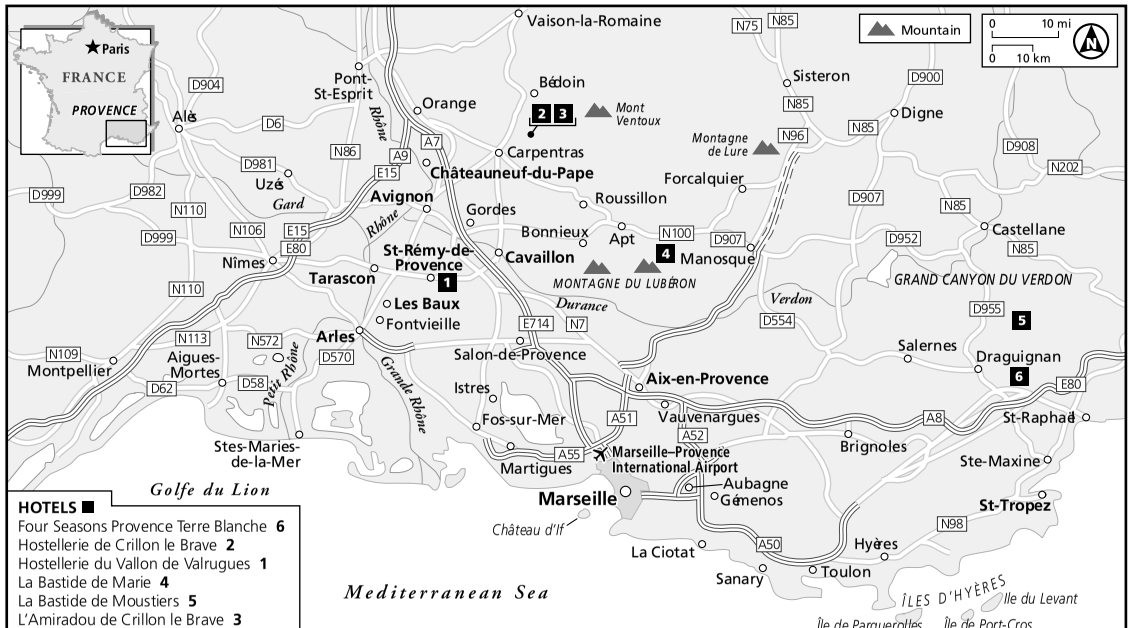
The Nice–Côte d'Azur International Airport (NCE) is not a bad choice at all, and it has the benefit of the nonstop Delta flight from New York. Nice is about a 2-hour drive on the autoroute from Aix-en-Provence, 2½ to 3 hours from Marseille. The road is clearly marked as you get on the A8 right near NCE.

There are also a number of smaller local airports; the one in Avignon is quite popular with locals for quick hops to Paris.

Some of the smaller regional airports (Toulouse, Carcassonne) are in the news because they're served by discount airlines that connect them to the U.K. or other E.U. cities. Meanwhile, the city of Marseille has announced it wants a bigger share of the discount-airline pie and is building a special terminal for these carriers, to open in 2006. Marseille is already served by several low-cost carriers.

BY TRAIN Train travel along the Paris-Marseille route is up 40%, and all anyone can talk about is the impact of the train on everyday life. The Gare St-Charles has been spruced up since the arrival of the TGV Méditerranée; if you're continuing on to Cannes-Nice-Monaco, you might change trains here. (Or you might not; some trains go through. Check your ticket.)

For the most ease, buy your tickets through **RailEurope** (✆ **888/382-7245;** www.raileurope.com) while still in the U.S.,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Bédoin
Mont Ventoux
Sisteron
Digne
Alès
Carpentras
Châteauneuf-du-Pape
Montagne de Lure
Forcalquier
Uzès
Gard
Avignon
Rhône
Roussillon
Gordes
Bonnieux
Apt
Manosque
Castellane
St-Rémy-de-Provence
Cavaillon
MONTAGNE DU LUBERON
GRAND CANYON DU VERDON
Nîmes
Tarascon
Les Baux
Fontvieille
Durance
Verdon
Salernes
Draguignan
Arles
Petit Rhône
Grande Rhône
Salon-de-Provence
Aigues-Mortes
Montpellier
Istres
Aix-en-Provence
Fos-sur-Mer
Vauvenargues
St-Raphaël
Brignoles
Ste-Maxime
Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer
Martigues
Marseille–Provence International Airport
Golfe du Lion
Marseille
Aubagne
Gémenos
St-Tropez
Château d'If
La Ciotat
Hyères
Toulon
Sanary
Mediterranean Sea
ÎLES D'HYÈRES
Île du Levant
Île de Port-Cros
Île de Parquerolles
HOTELS
Four Seasons Provence Terre Blanche 6
Hostellerie de Crillon le Brave 2
Hostellerie du Vallon de Valrugues 1
La Bastide de Marie 4
La Bastide de Moustiers 5
L'Amiradou de Crillon le Brave 3

as the deals in France are mostly reserved for those who buy 8 or 30 days in advance. You can buy either single-leg tickets or any of a number of multiple-trip passes.

If you speak enough French to carry it off, there are various train rates and promotions for locals—such as discounts for large families, those over 60, those ages 12 to 24, and so on. Many of these require proof of French residence.

Getting Around Provence

BY CAR You really can't "do" Provence without driving. Well, you can, but you won't get to fight with your spouse or your family or your loved ones. For information on car-rental firms and deals, see p. 20.

Meanwhile, you will need two types of maps: a big one that gives an overview of the area and another that shows details and back roads. If you have not done so before your arrival in the area, get out the bigger map and circle your target cities and make a daily plan. Yes, that's a pun in French, but one that's apropos: A *plan* is a map, and you need a map plan.

Many of the most attractive cities, towns, and villages in Provence are close to one another, but it's hard to know how to get to them all or how to plan how much time you're going to need. Without planning, you might not be able to connect the dots in a sensible way. Furthermore, there's a good bit of spread to Provence, which you might not grasp until you factor in how far apart places are and how difficult the roads can be.

You might also find that a village you read about or dreamed of does not touch you the way you thought it would, or that getting into town and parking are such a nightmare that you are no longer enchanted with that town. After a day or two, you may want to remap your assault and revamp your dreams.

Here are some other tips on driving in Provence:

- Driving in Provence may not be the romantic interlude you dreamed it would be. My late husband and I went on a 2-week driving trip across the south of France; we soon found

that getting in and out of the famous towns was grounds for divorce. Getting from the highway into the tourist part of Aix took about an hour and almost caused marital split. We gave up Arles, Antibes, and Nîmes due to traffic congestion and signs that led us in circles. Eventually we took to towns that were easy for us. Easy became more fun; not-so-famous became our finest memories.

- God help those who drive to icon cities in July or August; the traffic is unbearable. You can get from Cannes to St-Tropez in an hour or so off season; in season, it can take 4 hours. Make sure the car you rent has air-conditioning. If you don't want to be stuck in traffic jams, don't leave your resort except by foot.
- Driving is a better sport for two people than for one. You'll have to pull over at times to study the map unless you have someone to call out directions every time you come to a *rond point* (rotary). Or sometimes you just have to drive around the rotary two or three times until you can do it while reading the map.
- When making your map plan, take into consideration the days of the week, since you'll want to hit certain cities on market day. Get to the market early. Those that sell food almost always close by 1pm. There is also more traffic on market day, since there are more people in town.
- You can pay tolls with a credit card. But you cannot buy gas at an automatic-payment pump with a non-French credit card. You can use any credit card at the register or booth, but auto-pay pumps take only French debit cards.
- There are usually bathrooms near the pay stations on the autoroute, and they are clean. They may not be marked, but if you look for the *P,* which means parking, you'll find a pay phone and a toilet.
- French highways are dotted with excellent road stops, all with the word *Aire* in the name. There are basically two kinds. One has an icon of a pine tree (I call this **Aire de Pine-tree**); this kind of rest stop has parking and toilets. Then

there's **Aire de Coffee Cup,** marked with an icon of a—you guessed it. These have a gas station with a boutique, very clean bathrooms, and all sorts of other amenities. I'd hold out for the coffee cups unless you're desperate. They come up about every 30km (19 miles).

- Driving around eats money like mad. If you aren't used to driving in France, maybe this is a good time to tell you that pay roads are outrageously expensive and gas prices are frightfully high. Expect to spend 261€ to 435€ ($300–$500) in gas and tolls for a week's driving in the Riviera and/or Provence.
- Remember to gas up at *hypermarchés* (modern dry-goods stores) and to avoid the more expensive stations on the autoroute or in the center of town. The difference between 1€ and 1.15€ ($1.15 and $1.35) is enormous when it comes to paying for a tank of gas. The average small car's tank is 50 liters.
- Please remember that the larger the city, the more roads, the more suburbs, the more ring roads, and the more complications in getting to the center of town. Very often there are so many one-way streets that even if you can remember how you got into town, you can't use the same route to get out. Expect to get lost.
- When approaching a major city, follow the signs to *centre ville*. If you're spending the night in town, have directions to your hotel and an address and phone number handy—not buried in your suitcase. If needed, call for specific directions in English before you arrive.
- A *télécarte* (electronic phone card) will help you call your hotel from a pay phone while you're on the road (if you don't have a cellphone with you). Buy one at a news kiosk.
- Once you've chosen a village for exploration, make sure you understand how to pay for the parking.
- Try this trick: Locate the part of town you want to explore by foot and then, before looking for a parking space, drive around to check it out. This gives you an idea of directions,

of street parking, and of parking lots. You'll also know where the shops are, where you want to go, and maybe even how long you want to spend in town. Or you may decide you've seen enough.

- Each day when you leave your hotel for a new hotel and a new city, get detailed directions, preferably marked on a map. Do not waste time with road numbers, as they are rarely marked—and never when you need to make a quick decision. You need city directionals. The only good directions in France are based on city place names; directions such as *east* or *north* are useless.

BY BUS Provence is pretty well connected by regional buses. You don't do long haul, but you can do short hop. If you find the right hub city, you can do a good bit with buses, although you won't have a lot of flexibility in terms of scheduling.

BY TRAIN You can buy a France railpass or any of a number of other passes that allow you to hop on and off trains (p. 22). You must get such a pass from **Rail Europe** before you leave the U.S. Passes bought in Europe are similar, but are called **Domino** passes and require proof of E.U. residency.

If you plan a train trip punctuated by 3-day stays, and move across the south of France by train, you will indeed see a lot—and never know the emotions involved with traffic, tour buses, French cars that don't start without a computer code, or signs that point to all directions.

The TGV Méditerranée is building new stations and adding faster tracks—work should be completed between 2005 and 2007. The new station at Les Arcs–Draguignan will make a big impact on visits to both Provence and the Côte d'Azur.

Please remember that many of these new TGV stations bear the name of the town you think you are going to visit, but are, in fact, way out of town. This is now the case in Avignon, Valence, and Aix.

Sleeping in Provence

Even when I have a car, I find myself torn between two different methods of booking hotels: choosing those that are located in city centers, so that I can at least walk around in that town, and choosing those that are romantic and adorable and in the middle of nowhere, but possess great charm and a fair kitchen. Your own preference in this matter will lead you to specific hotel choices and overnight destinations.

You must also decide if you like staying in a different hotel every night and moving on every morning, even if you're moving only 81km (50 miles), or if you prefer to use a certain city as a hub and return to it each night. (No, Marseille is not an appropriate hub.)

I think the easiest way to get around Provence is to pick one or more hub areas with a hotel you can relate to; then stay for a few days (weeks, months, years). Go out on day trips from your hub, even if it means a little extra driving during the days and some doubling back. At least you won't have to pack up your belongings (and purchases) each night.

Note that there are no Hiltons in Provence and few Sofitels. Mostly there's funky, and there's funky grand deluxe. And then there's the new Four Seasons (see below). The places I've chosen as hub hotels are all luxury properties with well-known chefs. They allow you to hole up in comfort and step out into the real world at leisure.

Study your map and your needs before you book. Provence isn't that large, but it's plenty big—and it has distinctly different neighborhoods and areas. Often I don't even return to places I've been before, simply because there's so much to do and you've gotta make choices. By choosing a hub, you begin to choose your shopping destiny.

The hotels listed below are in various districts of Provence, and are presented to help you sort out which cities and shopping experiences best fit your plans. I usually do 2 to 3 nights in an area and then move on; I'm just too old for 1-night stands. However, now that I've been to the Four Seasons in Fayence, I'm thinking about never leaving.

Central Provence

Hostellerie du Vallon de Valrugues
Chemin Canto Cigalo, St-Rémy.

Area & Cities: St-Rémy, Tarascon, Les Baux, Salon, L'Isle sur la Sorgue, Aix

Départements: Bouches des Rhône (13), Vaucluse (84)

Despite the fact that I cannot pronounce the name of this hotel (and to this day still call it "That V de V place"), I booked it years ago and considered it my own personal find. To experience the fanciful and sprawling villa, the rooms decorated in Provençal fabrics, and a famous chef is all part of the dream. Although on the edge of town, the hotel really isn't within walking distance of downtown St-Rémy.

The regular rack rate for a double is about 250€ ($288) in season. For reservations, call ✆ **800/553-5090** in the U.S. Local phone ✆ 04-90-92-04-40. www.valrugues-cassagne.com.

Eastern Provence

Four Seasons Provence Terre Blanche
Château de Terre Blanche, Tourrettes.

Area & Cities: Cannes, Nice, St-Tropez, Moustiers-Ste-Marie

Départements: Alpes Maritimes (06), Var (83)

The Four Seasons is located in the hills nestled between several towns. Locals refer to it as being in Fayence, even though the mailing address for the hotel is Tourrettes. Calling this a hotel is also misleading.

The resort at Terre Blanche is a village unto itself, a getaway from the real world. There's nothing foreign about it, although the styling is rustic and somewhat Provençal. Surrounded by two golf courses with a private clubhouse and a series of little lanes built up with tiny casitas (two apartments per casita), the hotel doesn't feel French at all; it feels more international, speaking the common language of luxury.

Everyone gets a suite, as there are no single rooms. You can also get a whole house, of course. Some have private pools; all have vistas.

Although billed as a golf resort, there is a small spa and a gourmet kitchen. Many of the apartments have kitchens as well. You are in Provence, but just above Cannes and not far from St-Tropez, so day trips are easy.

Note: If it's your first time here, don't attempt the drive in the dark. The hotel will provide directions. It's 45 minutes from the Nice–Côte d'Azur airport, about 3 hours from Marseille.

Rates begin at 400€ ($460) per night. Ask about packages and promotional rates to introduce the property. Call **✆ 800/819-5053** for reservations from the U.S. Local phone ✆ 04-94-39-90-00. www.fourseasons.com/provence.

LA BASTIDE DE MOUSTIERS

La Grisolière, Moustiers-Ste-Marie.

Area & Cities: Lorgues, Fayence, Moustiers-Ste-Marie, Manosque, Digne, Forcalquier

Départements: Var (83), Alpes de Haute Provence (04)

La Bastide de Moustiers is higher up in the hills than the Four Seasons—it seems much further from Cannes and Nice. It's on the edge of a very famous shopping town that's filled with stores selling the local *faience* (painted, glazed, monochromatic earthenware). This hotel was the first of superchef Alain Ducasse's country inns. Compared to the Four Seasons, this choice feels much smaller and much more French.

There's a baffling list of choices and prices, each based on weekends and seasons, but figure about 300€ ($345) a night in season. Guests can choose from a few cottages, including the very private pigeon house. Take a look at www.bastide-moustiers.com for photos of each room; they vary in terms of style, use of space, showers or tubs (ask for the Philippe Starck tub), and adjoining space for the kids. Local phone **✆ 04-92-70-47-47.**

The Luberon

La Bastide de Marie

Route de Bonnieux, Quartier de la Verrerie, Ménerbes.

Area & Cities: Ménerbes, Roussillon, Lourmarin, the Luberon

Département: Vaucluse (84)

Yes, Ménerbes is the city that Peter Mayle made famous in his first book about Provence, and yes, this is one of the most plush rustic properties in France. It's been featured in every international design magazine you can imagine and combines the idea of country charm with the capabilities of a small hotel.

La Bastide de Marie is owned by the family that holds La Compagnie des Hôtels de Montagne—which includes a luxury hotel in Lyon and one outside St-Tropez (so don't be fooled by the mountain bit). Created from an old farmhouse and decorated in country chic, this is a feast for all senses as well as an excellent piece of marketing.

The hotel mostly sells by the European plan, which includes breakfast and dinner. Rates start around 400€ ($460), which with promotions often include breakfast and dinner with wine. ✆ **04-90-72-30-20.** www.labastidedemarie.com.

Northern Provence

Hostellerie de Crillon le Brave

Crillon le Brave.

Area & Cities: Carpentras, L'Isle sur la Sorgue (also easy to get to Avignon or the Luberon)

Département: Vaucluse (84)

This is the hotel that changed my life. On my first visit here, it was smaller and the house next door was for sale. I considered buying it—my first yearning for a house of my own in Provence. Instead, the hotel bought that empty house, enlarging and rearranging it into the spread of the property and redoing all the rooms at the same time.

While the hotel was already very Provençal and luxe, now it has stone towers, enormous bathrooms made from local stone, and other signs of magazine chic. The only thing rustic is the view. One of the most interesting things about this place is that it doesn't feel like a hotel—it's more like a country house or castle owned by very rich people with lots of style.

The Hostellerie is related to the Crillon in Paris in that it's part of the same duke's property; this was the country house built into an old fortress on top of a hill, with views of Mont Ventoux. You can relax in the sitting room with a glass of muscat, listening to opera and nibbling olives stuffed into puff pastry.

The hotel has a pool and gardens and offers cooking lessons in the off season. The staff here even packed and shipped my shopping finds for me. The excellent chef serves in a stone cellar with a roaring fire in winter; there's also a small bistro.

Rates begin at 250€ ($288). For U.S. reservations, call **Relais & Châteaux** (✆ **800/735-2478**). Local phone ✆ 04-90-65-61-61. www.crillonlebrave.com.

L'Amiradou de Crillon le Brave
Crillon le Brave.

Area & Cities: Carpentras, L'Isle sur la Sorgue (also easy to get to Avignon or the Luberon)

Département: Vaucluse (84)

This is not part of the hotel in Crillon le Brave, but is a private home managed by the same team. It was created especially for groups or families who want every luxury while resting under the same roof. It has air-conditioning, a pool, an elevator serving the three floors, and bourgeois chic decor. Rates vary depending on the season, but begin around 250€ ($288). Book by calling ✆ **04-90-12-89-50.** www.amiradou.com.

Provençal Buys

Local style is about color and comfort and rustic country wares that wear and wear and have the heart of the people and their land in every stitch, curve, contour, or taste. Color and

texture are the backbone of the look; handmade and slightly rough hewn—even when done with finesse—add to the value, even in foodstuffs and food packaging.

There are a few designer shops here and there—mostly in Aix or Avignon—but Provence is not the place to really wear or to seriously stock up on your Chanel. The things to buy are foodstuffs, fabrics, and decorative items. What's free to all browsers are ideas and visions that you can take home and translate into your own personal style.

If you insist on fashion accessories à la Provençal, go for the tote bags or backpacks. They're chic and they're sturdy. The bangle bracelets made of plastic-covered Provençal cottons are also nice. In markets, you can buy Provençal-print leggings.

When it comes to gifts for others, be careful. Provençal style may not travel well out of France or have the same cachet to others—who might not know what it means or costs. I bought a 87€ ($100) silk tie in a Provençal print for an American gentlemen who does a lot of work in France. He had no idea what it was or who (or what) Les Olivades was, so the entire gesture was wasted on him. Stick with soap.

The best souvenirs and gifts are inexpensive local products: soaps, jams, jars of honey, olive oil, local candies (a box of callisons for 4.35€/$5 is a winner), or chocolates (see p. 207 for information on zChocolat). Pottery is a great buy, but fragile—and often heavy and hard to pack or carry on.

The Market Day Rule of Shopping

Many villages aren't worth visiting if it's not market day. Sunday is particularly tricky, since most of France is closed on Sundays and on Monday mornings as well. As you decide which towns and villages to visit, mark your map for market days. Specific market days in towns and nearby villages are further delineated later in this chapter. Plan Sundays and Monday mornings with care. Also remember that parking is especially difficult on market days, so get there early.

To find out about antiques fairs or salons, *brocante* day at the local market, or general fun junk shopping, check out the

regional and national guides. *L'Incontournable du Chineur* is a tiny computer-printed free guide to fairs in the regions of Alpes-Maritimes, Aude, Bouches-du-Rhône, Gard, Hérault, Pyrénées-Oirentales, Var, and Vaucluse—in short, most of the Riviera and Provence. It includes a calendar of events as well as ads. You can get it at any flea market.

Night Markets

Several villages in Provence have market in the evening and into the night—for food and/or *brocante*. With the heat what it is, you can see the appeal of such an event. These markets usually start around 7pm and go on until 10 or 11pm.

Markets by Region

Bouches-du-Rhone

SATURDAY Arles

DAILY Marseille Vaucluse

MONDAY Bédarrides, Bédoin, Bollène, Cadenet, Cavaillon, Fontvieille, Forcalquier, Goult, Mazan, Piolenc, St-Didier, St-Saturnin-les-Avignon

TUESDAY Aix-en-Provence, Banon, Beaumes-de-Venise, Caromb, Cucuron, Fontaine-de-Vaucluse, Gordes, Mondragon, Mormoiron, St-Saturnin-d'Apt, Sarrians, La Tour-d'Aigues, Vaison-la-Romaine

WEDNESDAY Avignon, Buis-les-Baronnies, Entraigues, Malaucène, Mérindol, Monteux, St-Rémy-de-Provence, Sault, Le Thor, Valreas, Violès

THURSDAY Aubignon, Les Baux-de-Provence, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Malemort-du-Comtat, Nyons, Orange, Roussillon, Vacqueyras, Villeneuve-lès-Avignon

FRIDAY Bonnieux, Carpentras, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Eygalières, Lourmarin, Visan

SATURDAY Apt, Avignon, Digne-les-Bains, Grillon, Jonquières, Manosque, Monteux, Mornas, Pernes-les-Fontaines, Ste-Cécile-les-Vignes

SUNDAY Avignon, Camaret, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Mane, Mormoiron, Sarrians, La Tour d'Aigues

Note: Just because a town has a market or is listed above doesn't mean the market is fabulous or worth the trip. Not surprisingly, markets from town to town can be too similar to please, especially if you pick towns that are too close together. The following markets in Vaucluse are all excellent and different enough to satisfy a daily diet of market and more market:

MONDAY Bédarrides

TUESDAY Vaison-la-Romaine

WEDNESDAY St-Rémy-de-Provence

THURSDAY Orange

FRIDAY Carpentras

SATURDAY Ste-Cécile-les-Vignes (smaller than the others, but nice)

SUNDAY L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue

MARSEILLE

Marseille is the gateway to Provence, but it's not really a piece of Provence. It is its own planet; although it's in France, it's also among the stars of the firmament because it is very much its own thing—a city that has evolved because of its location as a major port, because of its proximity to Africa, colonial France, and shipping routes to the Far East. Marseille is a mélange of peoples and cultures, a true melting pot that simmers more happily than bouillabaisse.

You can visit Marseille and not feel you're in part of Provence or the Riviera or even France. You can also visit the region and feel no need to stop in Marseille. Go to Marseille simply because it's very different from everyplace else in France. And curious shoppers want to know.

Everyone in Paris may look alike, but in Marseille you've got everything from African women wrapped in turbans and layered multicolored gowns to Arab traders and North African colonists (called *les Pieds Noir* by the local French) to cutting-edge designers who are proud of the city's multi-ethnic heritage and are out to create a brave new world far from the constraints of Paris. Step this way; Marseille is a brave new French world.

Getting to Marseille

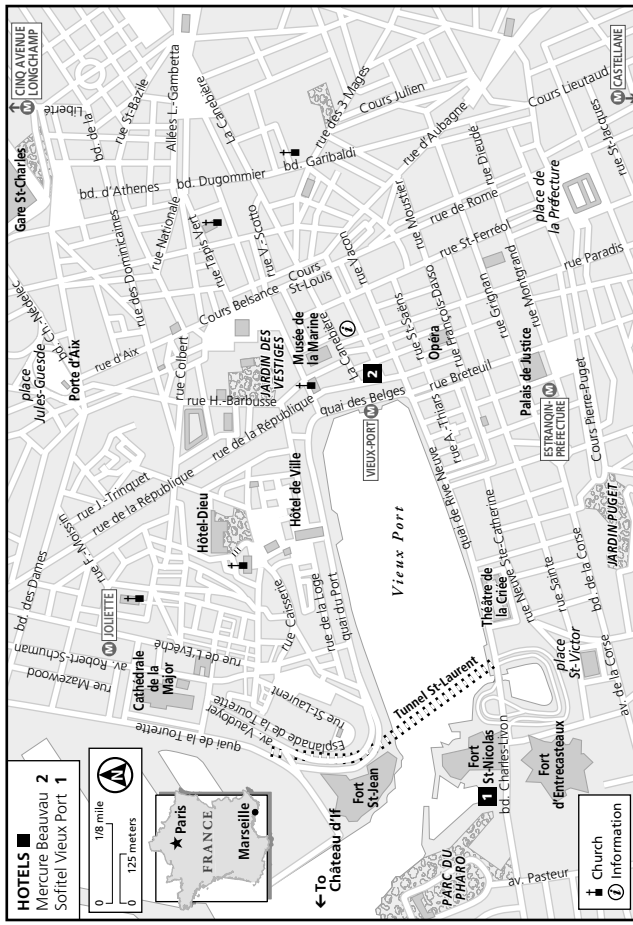
BY PLANE The Marseille airport is to the north, outside Marseille and halfway to Aix-en-Provence. If you're driving to the airport, it's marked MARIGNANE on road signs. In case you have a difficult connection and need to stay overnight, there's a **Sofitel** (✆ **04-42-78-42-78**) near the airport.

Although most major air travel connects through Paris or Frankfurt, there are a few nonstop flights to other hub cities.

Marseille happens to be one of those cities served by low-cost airlines—for example, you can fly here from Amsterdam on **Basiq Air** (www.basiqair.com) for an incredibly low price. Various other airlines keep adding flights; a new terminal in 2006 will host even more low-cost carriers.

BY CAR If you are driving into Marseille, get specific directions from your hotel, as there are ring roads and ways to avoid downtown traffic. Note that Marseille is right below the fork of two autoroutes (A7 and A8), which can confuse a first-timer.

BY BOAT About half a million cruise passengers a year pass through Marseille. There are also ferries from Marseille to Corsica. ***Note:*** The cruise terminal is not within walking distance of the Vieux Port (Old Port).



BY TRAIN The main train station, St-Charles, is north of the Old Port and the primary shopping district. It's not within walking distance of much of anything; you can take a taxi or the Métro.

In 2005, a TGV station will open at the port, which will allow cruise passengers to step from the train onto their ship.

The Lay of the Land

Like Paris, Marseille is divided into *arrondissements* (districts). They are included in specific listings below to help you understand which places are near to others, or to get an idea of distance (for example, your brain should quickly learn that something in the 15e isn't too convenient if you are in the 1er or 2e). The *arrondissements* sort of circle around the Old Port, and the central downtown-business-Bourse and shopping district is the 1er. The higher the number, the further away from center.

Marseille is the second most populous city in France, and the largest physically. You cannot begin to comprehend the sprawl unless you think of Los Angeles. I never totally understood Marseille until I had a car and was able to drive to various parts of the city, to the edges of the big towns, and to the rim of the sea.

Naturally, you get a lot of different neighborhoods and treasures with this much territory. Plus, there's a very long stretch of coastline abutting the city. But Marseille isn't flat, so there are hills to deal with everywhere, most set in rows surrounding the two ports, the Old Port (the center of the shopper's world) and the Port of Marseille (which is where the cruise ships come to port).

The Port of Marseille is on the far side of the Old Port; if you're arriving by cruise ship, you might want to walk into the district called Le Panier (but not at night, please). Le Panier is located on a series of small hills between the Old Port and the new one. It has some fabulous sights and heaps of soul, as well as the city's landmark cathedral and the gorgeous Vieille de Charité (now a museum), but it is not the shopping capital of the city. More serious shoppers may want to take a shuttle into town (marked VIEUX PORT); there will be a TGV station at the *quai* in 2005.

The Old Port is the center of the tourist universe; if you do not have a car, you will stay mostly in this part of town. The Old Port is U-shaped, and the two sides of the U represent other important parts of town: the Panier (as discussed above) and the restaurant and shopping district. If you are standing at the

Old Port, looking at the water, with your back toward the Bourse and train station, then the 2e is to your right, along with the Panier and the cruise docks; and the 4e and 7e are to your left, with restaurant row, Nôtre Dame de la Garde, the Sofitel Vieux Port, and so on.

There are also many, many shopping opportunities and museums outside the center of town; some require a tour bus, a car, or a willingness to pay a lot to a taxi driver.

To really understand the magic of Marseille, you need to step back from the downtown hustle and bustle and see the sea and the effect that 56km (35 miles) of beach has on a community. It also helps to survey the Calanques, a craggy seascape of rocky cliffs that run alongside the beach from Marseille to Cassis, some 25km (16 miles) away. Not only are they breathtaking, but they also hide many little beach coves and pizza places, where you can share some of the moments that become memories when you are forced back into the real world. Sorry, no shopping here.

Marseille is a closed town. It has layers of personalities and secrets; it is not small, nor charming, nor sitting out there in the sunshine, waiting for you to discover it. The only way you can get hold of the soul and essence of the city is to have secret addresses and be ready to delve beneath the surface. Those looking for Camelot should apply elsewhere.

You can find information about Marseille at **www.marseille-tourisme.com**.

Getting Around Marseille

Traffic in Marseille is beyond terrible; it's just plain disgusting. If you must drive, take your car to a central parking lot and leave it for the day. Do not park on the street. Do lock your car and make sure you've left nothing inside it.

The Métro has some, but limited, use for tourists. You can easily get from the St-Charles train station to the Old Port by Métro.

If you're doing a lot of sightseeing, you will need some taxis and very good walking shoes.

Safety Matters

As in any big city, you should be careful about carrying too much cash or flashing it about. On the other hand, it's thought that Marseille is safer than Paris these days. Who knows? You don't want to find out. There are banks and ATMs everywhere; take advantage of them.

Sleeping in Marseille

Your choice of location in Marseille will make a difference in how you see the city and how much shopping you get done. Perhaps the glory of Marseille is not to shop too much, but rather to buy yourself the experience of luxury against a backdrop of the sea.

Le Petit Nice

160 promenade de la Corniche, 7e.

This is the local Relais & Châteaux property, located in what's almost a little village right on the seaside. From here, you'll have to taxi into central Marseille. But the hotel is drop-dead fabulous and the surrounding area is filled with charm.

You can stay in the small (15-room), bright-yellow villa, which has a gorgeous swimming pool. You can dine on the terrace overlooking the sea and feel totally lost to the real world. The Passédat family owns and runs the villa property, and Gérald Passédat is the award-winning chef.

Rates are about 348€ ($400) a night. Make U.S. reservations through **Relais & Châteaux** (✆ **800/735-2478**). Local phone ✆ 04-91-59-28-08. www.relaischateaux.com.

Mercure Beauvau

4 rue Beauvau, 1er.

This was the most famous hotel in town at one time; then it got dumpy. Then a miracle happened and the hotel closed for over a year for extensive renovations. It's just now open, with millions of euros' worth of work turning it into the classiest

four-star in the Old Port area. There is not a better location in town: The Old Port is out your window, next door is the tourist office, and next to that is the Métro.

Rates start at 110€ ($127). For U.S. reservations, call ✆ **800/MERCURE.** Local phone ✆ 04-91-54-91-00. www.mercure.com.

Sofitel Palm Beach

200 corniche John F. Kennedy, 7e.

When I booked into the Sofitel Palm Beach, I knew only that I was getting one of the new hotel experiences in Marseille—I didn't realize that it was some distance from the Old Port. After I accepted that this wasn't going to be the most perfect shopping location, I settled down to enjoy the view.

The location turned out to be perfect, as I had a car and could get to the various spread-out parts of Marseille. Shopping wasn't a problem at all. But the best part was simply gazing out at the sea and enjoying picnics on my own balcony.

The hotel is built into a rocky cliffside that goes down into the water. The place is very modern and luxe without being too expensive; it also has spa facilities, contributing to the resort-like feel. Before you arrive, call the concierge for exact driving directions—if you come from the highway, you can bypass downtown and enjoy a drive along the coast that will take your breath away.

Rates are about 230€ ($265) per night, although numerous promotional deals are available. For U.S. reservations, call ✆ **800/763-4835.** Local phone ✆ 04-91-16-19-00. www.sofitel.com.

Sofitel Vieux Port

36 bd. Charles Livon, 7e.

This high-rise hotel overlooks the Old Port, offering fabulous views and an excellent restaurant. It is within walking distance of town, but it's a good walk. You can also take a bus. The Sofitel hotel is a good compromise in that it gives you a feel

for the water without being totally out in the boonies (although the view is likely to be more of the old parts of town than just waves and sea).

There are many different rates and promotions; expect to pay at least 200€ ($230). For U.S. reservations, call ✆ **800/763-4835.** Local phone ✆ 04-91-15-59-00. www.sofitel.com.

Eating in Marseille

Le Miramar

12 quai du Port, 2e.

This restaurant is the most famous in town for bouillabaisse, but you can have a perfectly nice meal without going for the big B. A new chef combines the traditional seafaring menu with contemporary and fusion twists, making this the talk of the town. My lunch extravaganza included fish baked in a salt cake, the best fish of my life. If you dine outside, be sure to peek inside at the murals and other decor. To book a table, try ✆ **04-91-91-10-40.** It is notoriously hard to get reservations here, but if you walk over and ask, you'll probably get what you want. Closed Sunday and Monday.

Les Trois Forts

In Sofitel Vieux Port, 36 bd. Charles Livon, 7e.

Located on the top floor of the Sofitel, this restaurant is best booked for dinner so you can watch the sun set over the harbor and the lights come on all over town. The chef has won awards; this is one of the best tables in town. For reservations, call ✆ **04-91-15-59-56.**

Shopping in Marseille

Because Marseille has reinvented itself, the stores sell a far wider assortment than you would ever imagine, and there is a large local selection. You'll see many one-off stores that have no other

branches. On the other hand, there's also a Disney store, so this can't claim to be a sleepy town.

In fact, there's a branch (or several) of every French multiple, most department stores, and almost anything that Paris has to offer. You can do anything from fancy-schmancy designer shopping to down-and-dirty discount shopping. Because of the large population base, Marseille has many stores that you will not find anywhere else in the south of France.

Design students flock to Marseille to open their shops; the city has a famous fashion and costume museum and is proud to be host to up-and-coming designers.

While Marseille does abut Provence, and you will find much Provençal influence, you will also find African influence in everyday fashions and lifestyle. This is partly because ethnic is chic now, because imports from India and Africa are cheap, and because a touch of African flair when mixed with the colors of the south actually sells to a non-African population. There are more funky shops here than just about anywhere else.

Snacking & Shopping

The city has zillions of pizza parlors, most of which are great. Restaurant Row is off to one side of the Old Port, which is surrounded by cafes. Look for place aux Huiles, right off cours d'Estienne d'Orves.

Les Arcenaulx

25 cours d'Estienne d'Orves, 1er.

This rehabbed arsenal space is now a fabulous bookstore, gift shop, and cafe. It is charm itself for lunch or snacks.

Les Colonies

26 rue Lulli, 1er.

This fabulous location, near the Opéra and hidden little shopping streets, serves coffee and chocolates.

LINA'S
Canebière, 1er.

Lina's is a famous Parisian salad-sandwich shop for quick and easy meals. A recent arrival in Marseille, it has plopped down next to the Bourse and near the Fashion Museum, creating a mode theme.

RESTAURANT CAFE BROCANTE
16 rue Lulli, 1er.

This small restaurant also sells *brocante;* its location is near the Opéra and little streets for shoppers.

SHOPPING HOURS

In Marseille, country hours prevail. A very large number of the stores close for lunch. They are also closed all day Sunday as well as Monday morning. Some of the really fancy stores will open up just for you if you make an appointment.

Most stores open at 10am; some small ones open at 9:30am; Nouvelles Galeries in the CC Bourse opens at 9am. Department stores do not close for lunch. Stores that do close for lunch usually reopen at 2pm and stay open until 7pm. However, in the south, they may not reopen until 3pm.

SHOPPING NEIGHBORHOODS

ESTIENNE-D'ORVES This is a square right next to the Old Port, located in the 4e (to your left if your back is to the 1er). To me, Estienne-d'Orves symbolizes all that is glorious about the new Marseille. I actually heard of an apartment here and was swept away, but friends warned me that it can be very noisy on Saturday nights. Indeed, there are many restaurants, clubs, and bars here; Restaurant Row is around the corner. Meanwhile, you'll also find one of the best stores in town (Les Arcenaulx), as well as some other not-too-shabby stores, like an enormous branch of Agnès b. Years ago, this space was a dump, but now it whispers of magic. Don't miss it.

PANIER It means *basket* in French; to me it's more of a medieval wonderland with a touch of the Corsican chapter of *The Godfather* thrown in. This is the 2e—festooned with medieval alleys and colorful laundry lines, tiny pizza parlors, stairways that will leave you breathless. It's home to the city's main cathedral and the awesome Vieille de Charité, once the poor house and now a museum with cafe and bookstore *(bien sur)*. You won't find heaps of shopping opportunities here, but there are some good ones, including *santon* (figures in a Christmas crèche) makers and the best soap store in town.

CANEBIERE Running through the heart of downtown, creating the core of the 1er *arrondissement,* this street is also called the boulevard de la Liberation. Downtown's main drag is indeed the Canebière, nicknamed "can of beer" by GIs and remembered by tourists that way. This commercial street leads from alongside the train station (St-Charles) to the Old Port and has many old hotels, stores, some Métro stops, and even a museum or two.

The Bourse is located on this street; it is a building that will stun you with its grandeur, the type of architecture you had no idea was beyond Paris. Most of the buildings on Canebière were created by good old Baron Haussmann, who created the Paris we know today. Between the Old Port and the train station are the many side streets of the main shopping district. I have named this area "The Grid" (see below).

THE GRID In an old-fashioned way, the part of town I call the Grid represents what some might refer to as "downtown," the main shopping district. The Grid is located directly behind the Old Port and alongside La Canebière. The main streets run west to east, but the cross streets within the Grid also have good shopping—and many hidden pleasures. Appropriately, the main shopping street is called rue Paradis. However, the rue St-Ferréol is also important for multiples and mass-market names, as are the side streets—particularly rue Grignan, home to many fancy designer boutiques. Don't forget to explore around the Opéra, as the little streets here have some of the best boutiques and represent the hidden aspects of Marseille that I've told you about.

CC BOURSE The Bourse is a fancy building right on Canebière, but right behind it is a big American-style shopping mall, Centre Commercial Bourse. It's on the other side of the Canebière from the Grid but in the same area, just an adjoining neighborhood. The entrance is rather hidden: You go upstairs and over (or simply walk over 1 block and enter through Nouvelles Galeries).

LA JOLIETTE La Joliette is the official name of the area of working docks and where cruise ships come to port. Just outside the Old Port, it is in the 2e.

COURS JULIEN This is an adorable, charming quasi-residential area with a square (flea market once a month, book fair other weekends) and trees and a Métro stop and many small but hip boutiques . . . but not so hip as to appeal only to those under 20. This is in the 6e; it's actually not that far from the St-Charles train station.

Marseille Resources A–Z

Antiques

Because of the traditional spread of wealth outside Marseille, most of the serious antiques dealers are located toward or in Aix. However, a few districts in Marseille are worth browsing.

For *brocante,* locals tend to go out of town. On the last Sunday of each month, there's a *brocante* fair in Aubagne called **La Tourtelle** that features about 120 dealers. (This market is fun, but I don't know that I'd make a special trip unless I had nothing else to do on a Sun.) Call ✆ **04-42-18-18-48** for more information, or call ✆ **04-42-18-18-31** for the exact dates of the fairs.

Bargain Basements

Eurodif
6–10 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

Eurodif is a discount store, run by the same folks who own Bouchara, a firm that makes fabrics and table linens for the

masses. Outside of Paris, the Bouchara and Eurodif businesses are combined into one giant pleasure house of shopping fun. It's borderline junky, with everything from housewares and accessories to kids' clothes, teen fashions, and women's clothes for both regular and plus sizes. Upstairs, you can look at fabric by the yard, trims, and hardware. I've shopped this chain all over France, and I love it. Those who frequent only Gucci will not be amused. Eurodif opens at 9:30am.

TATI
14 rue de la République, 2e.

Tati in Marseille has not yet closed due to the company's financial problems. It isn't as sophisticated as Eurodif, but the prices are similar. The store is one giant bin, which you prowl through hoping to find something decent. Tati's pink-and-white tattersall logo is printed on the bags and is famous all over France. This is not a status shopping bag.

BEAUTY

The department stores are your best bet for a large selection of both big and small brand names—American, French, or international. Pharmacies everywhere sell pharmaceutical beauty brands, and Monoprix, right on the Canebière, sells beauty items as well.

If you need your hair done, try the major French chains in Marseille: **Jean Louis David** (av. Prado) and **Jacques Dessange** (Old Port).

PARASHOP
76 rue Paradis, 1er.

This chain has branches all over France, and you can use its fidelity card at all outposts. It is a *parapharmacie* (large discount drugstore) that sells mostly beauty brands from major French pharmaceutical companies. Parashop discounts items by 20% to 25%.

SEPHORA
56 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

This is a large branch of the beauty supermarket Sephora.

BIG NAMES

Following are some of the big-name designer boutiques and multiples in Marseille.

AGNES B.
31 cours d'Estienne d'Orves, 1er.

CACHAREL
68 rue Paradis, 1er.

CARTIER
32 rue Grignan, 1er.

CHACOK
47 rue Paradis, 6e.

CHARLES JOURDAN
55 rue Paradis, 6e.

FAÇONNABLE
25 rue Grignan, 1er.

GERARD DAREL
36 rue Paradis, 1er.

HERMES
27 rue Paradis, 1er.

KENZO
67 rue Paradis, 1er.

LONGCHAMP
21 rue Paradis, 1er.

LOUIS VUITTON
22 rue Grignan, 1er.

Marina Rinaldi
74 rue Paradis, 1er.

Max Mara
37 rue Paradis, 1er.

Mont Blanc
22 rue Paradis, 1er.

Tod's
99 rue Paradis, 1er.

Ventilo
28 rue Montgrand, 1er.

Wolford
18 rue Haxo, 1er.

Yves Saint Laurent
104 rue Paradis, 1er.

Zara
57 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

Boutiques

Make
67 rue Francis Davso, 1er.

Make sells fashion, tabletop, decorative items, home style, gifts, and T-shirts made of camouflage and leopard prints—plus other cutting-edge materials for the teen and tween set.

Marianne Cat
53 rue Grignan, 6e.

I don't care if you buy anything or not—any fashionista worth her espadrilles will come here just to gawk, and to take lessons in how high style is mixed, matched, blended, and reworked to include a makeup bar, an art gallery, and plenty of expensive designer clothes in a euro-funky vein of classic chic.

Children's Clothes

Most of these are multiples, so the addresses below are not necessarily the only locations.

Du Pareil au Meme
7 rue Grignan, 1er.

Floriane
40 rue Paradis, 1er.

Jacadi
2 rue Grignan, 1er.

Jok
10 rue Sainte, 1er.

La Compagnie des Petits
16 rue Paradis, 1er.

Petit Boy
1 rue Grignan, 1er.

Tout Compte Fait
54 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

Department Stores

Galeries Lafayette
40–48 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

Right in the heart of the downtown shopping district is Galeries Lafayette's large store, complete with a Provençal souvenirs section. This is perhaps the largest branch store in the south of France, and it's better than the one in Nice.

Nouvelles Galeries
CC Bourse, 2 rue Bir-Hakeim, 1er.

A division of Galeries Lafayette, Nouvelles Galeries is located in CC Bourse and has a fabulous supermarket right inside its door (ground floor). Although it's not quite as large as Galeries

downtown, it does offer plenty of choices and brands. You'll see a Provençal souvenirs department as you enter; the store has a parapharmacie as well.

Ethnic Looks

Biasa
43 rue Francis Davso, 1er.

This small shop sells a very particular blend of south of France meets ethnic, with a touch of Africa melted in. It is not a contrived look, though it does remind me of American fashion lines, such as Blue Fish, and even of Eileen Fisher (which isn't ethnic at all). The clothes are artsy and often baggy, funky without being too costumey. Prices are moderate.

Expotamie
CC Bourse, 1er; 20 rue Montgrand, 6e.

This fashion/home-style chain has stores only in the south of France and sells a rather African-inspired southern look that is sort of Pier 1 goes to town. It has its own lines, but also carries some brands that are ethnically styled. Prices are low to moderate; the selection is fun. The store in CC Bourse is much better (and larger) than the other location.

Mia Zia
49 rue Francis Davso, 1er.

See "Finds," below.

Finds

Les Arcenaulx
25 cours d'Estienne d'Orves, 6e.

This is a bookstore, gift shop, tearoom, spiritual place of being, . . . a space created out of rehabilitated warehouses and the city arsenal (hence the name). Walk into the series of stone salons, and you'll be transported to another world. Some

people think this is the 4e and others the 1er; it's right in the Old Port area, next to Restaurant Row.

MANON MARTIN
10 rue de la Tour, 1er.

This hatmaker master wizard has a shop in Paris (19 rue de Turenne, 4e), but he does a wonderful business in Marseille, mostly for weddings and special events but also for those going up to Chantilly or Deauville for the horse races—or for those who simply need hats. The hats are made of all media and range from funky to fantastic and very fabulous. They are also carried in most department stores in France. Manon Martin even does custom orders. Prices can get a tad high for the over-the-top stuff, but then, why not?

MIA ZIA
49 rue Francis Davso, 1er.

Now a small chain (with stores in Geneva and St. Barths as well as Paris), this boutique sells an ethnic lifestyle look that's inspired by North Africa but not costumey or cheap. It's pure luxe and elegance in earth tones. The stores themselves are also gorgeous, like terra-cotta jewel boxes. Prices are high.

UNIVERS DE CHRISTIAN LACROIX
6 rue Sainte, 1er.

In case you haven't noticed, most Lacroix stores have closed (they're often made over into Emilio Pucci stores). Lacroix has launched a whole new concept store, which began in Tokyo, went to Bangkok, and then came to France via Marseille.

FOODSTUFFS

BATAILLE
18 place Nôtre Dame du Mont, 6e.

I've died, gone to heaven, and returned here to the city's premier *traiteur* to smell the cheese, gaze upon the produce, pine

for a taste of everything in the cases, and become a very fat but happy angel. You can eat at one of the few tables or you can buy picnic fare to go.

Chocolaterie de Puyricard
155 rue Jean Mermoz, 1er.

This is one of the most famous chocolate shops in France. Even though this brand was founded only in 1967, it boasts an international reputation. There are now several branches in various cities in the south. Check out the seasonal molded chocolates—chicks and fish for Easter, and the like. Another local specialty is the chocolate pralines made with almond pâté.

Dromel Aine
6 rue de Rome, 1er.

Although this is a chocolate shop, the real specialty is covered almonds, which come in a variety of sizes and are called *dragées,* a traditional item for good luck at weddings (white ones) or for babies (pink or blue). We threw them at my son's bar mitzvah. The business was founded in 1760; the tradition of offering sugared almonds began in the court of Louis XIV. This is the status *dragée* source in France.

Four des Navettes
136 rue Sainte, 7e.

This is the oldest bakery in town, going back to the late 18th century. The name of the shop relates to a specific local specialty, a cookielike, bread-stick thing called a *navette,* named after a small boat. Every bakery in town makes them, but this is the most famous source. The story of the *navette* is more charming than the eating: This is the boat that the three Marys arrived in. The bakery is open every day, and you can even shop online at www.fourdesnavettes.com.

MAISON DU PASTIS
108 quai du Port, 2e.

I guess it's my job to report what's here, not to tell you that I like it. Besides, my opinion of pastis, as a drink or flavoring in other products, is X-rated. This is right in the Old Port—you can't miss it.

NOUCHIG
45 rue Vacon, 1er.

This is another source for *dragées,* but it's chic and fancy, and there's nothing old-fashioned about it at all. It also sells chocolates and other candies and is most famous for its wraps and presentations; a real status gift.

GENERAL STORES

MONOPRIX
36 La Canebière, 1er.

This branch of Monoprix is right in the heart of town and has two levels, with a full grocery store upstairs. It's one of the most complete Monoprix stores I've ever been to, and it's perfect for picking up health and beauty aids, anything you left at home, whatever you might need for beach play or the kids, and so on. Monoprix has very good clothes for not much money; I'm especially fond of the children's lines. This is also a good place for inexpensive gifts. Oh yes, it opens at 8:30am.

RESONANCES
CC Bourse, 1er.

This store began in Paris's Bercy Village as an experiment, and was so successful that additional branches have opened in both Paris and other major French cities. For an American shopper, Résonances looks and feels something like Pottery Barn, but it specializes in small items and gifts, books and cooking gear. Not all of the merchandise is French, but there is a great

selection of gifts including soaps and olive oils. One of the best stores in town.

Gifts

Also see "Soap," below, and "General Stores," above.

La Maison Marseillaise
38 rue Francis Davso, 1er.

This store sells tabletop, home style, and gift items in a contemporary space; the items have some whimsy and humor to them, with clean lines and high style—nothing cutie-pie here or even Provençal.

Les Comptoirs de Provence
40 rue Francis Davso, 1er.

This is your dream store for local scents, aromatherapy, and Provençal herbs and spices. It features products by Durance and Florame, two small French lines that are not found all over; they offer a full range of treatments and home products. One of the best stores in town.

Malls

Centre Commercial Bourse
Rue Bir-Hakeim, 1er.

Located right behind the Bourse (hence the name), this is the town's large American-style mall, which happens to be not only air-conditioned but also the home of a very nice museum. The mall has one of just about every French multiple, as well as an **SNCF** train ticket office (expect a long line). Most of the stores open at 10am, but the department store **Nouvelles Galeries,** a division of Galeries Lafayette, opens at 9am. (It has a huge and wonderful supermarket.) There's also **FNAC** for CDs, books, and electronics; **Habitat** for home style; **Loisirs et Création,** a crafts store; and several cafes between the usual

mall suspects. Perhaps the fanciest and chicest tenant is **Résonances,** a gift source. You can get a lot done in this mall, so don't knock it.

MARKETS & FAIRS

Options range from daily fish markets in Old Port to a very nice food market at rue Longue des Capucins, near the Canebière. This is where you can buy all the ingredients for fresh bouillabaisse. Also check out the heaps of spices, dried fruits, and many exotics. Aux Capucins is open daily from 7am to 2pm and from 4 to 8pm for the after-work crowd (Métro: Noailles).

There's a flower market every Monday morning at place Felix Baret and on Tuesday and Saturday morning in the allées Meilhan.

A Provençal market that sells regional specialties is held every day at the place Castellane. There's also a fresh food market, Le Marché du Prado, that's extremely lively and very ethnic.

Brocante is sold at the flea market at Porte d'Aix, which is not the most glamorous neighborhood. Expect a lot of broken Edith Piaf records. There's a daily book market at Le Cours Julien.

On weekends, a gallery called Les Puces de la Madrague (4 rue Neuve Ste-Catherine, 4e) is open. The big weekend flea market is called Le Marché aux Puce de Marseille, and it's open Sunday from 9am to 7pm (chemin de la Madrague-Ville, 15e). There are about 200 dealers at the flea market, but the specialty here is African food, arts, and crafts. The market is rather far out in the 15e; you can get there on the no. 35 bus.

The second Sunday of each month, there's a *brocante* fair at the Cours Julien. This isn't a huge market, but it's a charming district of Marseille and worth doing if you hit it on the right day.

Note that most locals drive into the heart of Provence for flea markets, and L'Isle sur la Sorgue is not too far away (p. 208).

The city of Marseille has a famous Santon Fair, held from November to February in the allées Meilhan. A Garlic Festival runs from mid-June to mid-July, and there's a pretty big (and somewhat fancy) antiques salon each October. Check the tourist office (4 La Canebière, right at the Old Port) for other shopping events.

Provençal Crafts

Arterra

1 rue du Petit Puits, 2e.

This maker of *santons* has a small shop in the Panier district; the *santons* are not as bright as usual and therefore considered very sophisticated. Arterra makes the *santons* for the biggest names in Provençal style.

Ateliers Marcel Carbonel

47 rue Neuve Ste-Catherine, 4e.

Carbonel is one of the most famous makers of *santons* in France. The shop is open Monday through Saturday; on Tuesday and Thursday, you can watch him at work. Small *santons* start around 12€ ($14). Closed in August.

Faienceries Figueres

10–12 av. Lauzier, 8e.

I don't care if you steal a car, hail a taxi, or hire a driver: Do what you must to get to this slightly out-of-the-way location, where *faience* is a misleading term. Yes, Faienceries Figuères makes the squiggles and colors on white porcelain, but its claim to fame is the incredible non-edible selection of porcelain fruits and vegetables that are disturbingly lifelike. My favorites are the trompe l'oeil platters with half-eaten cookies or candies. The olives in a dish are also fun.

The shop is on the factory premises; hours are Monday through Friday from 8:30am to noon and 1 to 6:30pm,

Saturday from 8:30am to 12:30pm. Check it out online at www.faiencerie-figueres.com. Note that the shop is on the far eastern side of Marseille, not far from the Musée de la Faience.

LES OLIVADES
102 rue Paradis, 1er.

This is a small branch of the famous fabric and design firm.

SOULEIADO
117 rue Paradis, 1er.

This is a large and airy shop from the famous fabric firm that brought the look to the U.S.

TERRE E PROVENCE
19–21 rue Montgrand, 6e.

This is a small chain of pottery stores that has branches in most of the tourist towns in Provence. The prices are a tad high, but the wares are nice—and Terre è Provence ships.

SOAP

LA COMPAGNIE DE PROVENCE
1 rue Caisserie, 2e.

Soap, soap, soap: Did someone scream soap? This is the best soap source in town and one of the best in France. Yes, it sells the famous square block of traditional 72% Marseille soap, but there are so many other things here that you may want something more exciting. You might even want to buy a candle that looks like the block of soap (fooled me!). Take a look at the little gift packs here: Three paper-wrapped scented soaps tied with string and sealed with an old-fashioned wax seal go for 10€ ($12). The store sells all sorts of bars and gift packs and bath mats and tubes and scents and yummy things. La Compagnie de Provence products are also sold at Bergdorf Goodman and Barneys in the U.S.

La Savonnerie du Serail
50 bd. Anatole de la Forge, 15e.

This is a real-live Marseille soap factory with a factory store. It's in the middle of nowhere; I came on a tour bus. The factory is interesting, but the shopping isn't great. If you visit the store, buy only the original Marseille soap (72%), as the scented soaps are not the best in France. The soap tour is offered once a month by the tourist office and costs about 10€ ($12). I'd take a bath instead. Open Monday through Friday from 8am to noon and 2 to 6pm (5pm on Fri).

L'Occitane
20–22 rue Haxo, 1er.

Everybody's favorite soap and Provençal gift store, L'Occitane sells all sorts of scents as well as its own makeup, skin care, men's line, home lines, and so on. I go through little tins of cannelle-orange oil, which I dab on my carpets and bedspread to scent my home.

Teens

Most of these are multiples, so the addresses below are not the only locations.

H&M
29 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

Mango
17 rue St- Ferréol, 1er.

Pimkie
27 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

Pro Mod
52 rue St-Ferréol, 1er.

BEYOND MARSEILLE

Marseille has zillions of suburbs that seem as close to metro Marseille as some of the arrondissements, so it's confusing to understand where the city begins and ends. The confusion is compounded by the fact that many malls (called commercial centers) with large chains and department stores are actually in these 'burbs.

Perhaps the two most famous outlying towns are **Cassis** and **Aubagne.** Cassis is on the water; it's one of the most picture-perfect fishing villages in France. It's also mobbed in nice weather. Aubagne takes a little knowing—it's the home of Marcel Pagnol and is known as one of the ceramics cities. It's not chockablock with cutie-pie ceramics shops, although the **Ravel** factory is worth a trip if you want big pottery planters. I'd save Aubagne for one of the ceramics fairs—most of which are held in August (call the tourist office at ✆ **04-42-03-49-98** for dates).

The rest of this chapter addresses Provence towns in alphabetical order.

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

Everyone just calls it Aix, pronounced like the letter of the alphabet: *X*.

Aix is a very large city, not the sleepy little sun-splashed fountain that you think is representative of the town. Even the city center has a few parts to it, so if you're driving, you'll need to study a map and drive around a little to take it all in and get oriented before you park.

This city center is not on a grid system. The reason you need to grasp the lay of the land is that you won't find a parking spot on a market day, and you might get lost finding downtown even when it's not market day.

The Lay of the Land

Although the Aix you're dreaming of is small and *intime,* the city in fact is not. It takes quite some time to get from either the autoroute or the TGV station into the Cute.

The main drag of the *centre ville* is called cours Mirabeau. This is the street with the biggest stores and multiples (yes, there's a **Monoprix**). The tree-lined boulevard was rebuilt recently and brought from four to two lanes of traffic, which means it's even more crowded in summer and on market days. More trees were planted, sidewalks were widened, and the ambience is much improved.

Aix has positioned itself as the capital of Provence and has been attracting tourists for thousands of years; there are tons of students around because of the local language school, as well as tour groups galore. There's a small street of fancy-schmancy designer stores (rue Marius Reinaud) and a second fancy street with more big names (rue Fabrot). Aix just may be the shopping capital of Provence.

There's a touristy street (rue Espariat) with a combination of affordable shops and cute tourist traps (TTs). I'm also partial to the back area around place des Chapeliers that's filled with multiples such as **Orcanta** (no. 2 bis) for lingerie, as well as some real-people shopping.

Aix has plenty of designer shops, ranging from **Sonia Rykiel** and **Hermès** to **Yves Saint Laurent, Escada, Christian Lacroix,** and even **Robert Clergerie,** the shoe maven. There's also **Souleiado** and **Les Olivades,** as would be expected, and then there are some bridge designer lines that you may know of only if you shop in Paris, such as **Nitya** (11 rue Marius Reinaud), an Indian-inspired line with its flagship store on the rue St-Honoré in Paris. On side streets you'll find **Rodier** and most other multiples.

You'll find that everything interconnects and weaves together in a maze, leading to an amazing number of stores. Many are TTs and branches of famous French multiples, such as **Geneviève Lethu** (13 rue Aude) and **Sephora.** Rue de l'Ancienne hosts branches of **Lacoste, Laurèl,** and **Descamps.**

Sleeping in Aix

HOTEL DES AUGUSTINS
3 rue de la Masse.

Everyone needs to find a hotel created from an old convent. This one is well located and not too expensive (rooms start around 100€/$115). There is, however, the problem of the bells, bells, bells. Local phone ✆ **04-42-27-28-59.**

VILLA GALLICI
Av. de la Violette.

This just might be the most perfect hotel you will ever visit. It also joins the ranks of hotels featured in novels—it was a character in a John Grisham book. To add to that, it's been featured in every design magazine in the United States and continental Europe, and it just starred in a multiple-page layout in *Town + Country.* It's drop-dead gorgeous and also located within walking distance of town, fulfilling all needs.

It has recently changed hands and is now part of Group Baglioni; the restaurant has gone fancy. Prices are about 261€ to 609€ ($300–$700) per night. For U.S. reservations, call **Relais & Châteaux** (✆ **800/735-2478**). Local phone ✆ 04-42-23-29-23. www.villagallici.com.

Eating in Aix

The town is filled with cafes, pizza parlors, ice-cream stands, and creperies—you'll have no trouble grabbing a bite in between shopping excursions.

One of the best tables in town is the one-star **Le Clos de la Violette,** 10 av. de la Violette (✆ **04-42-23-30-71;** fax 04-42-21-93-03), which is located in an old house with gardens. The luncheon menu is about 35€ ($40); you'll need a jacket. Sit, enjoy, and forget the tourists . . . and dinner.

At the place de l'Hôtel de Ville is **La Cour de Rohan,** a tearoom and tiny restaurant with a patio; open daily.

The most famous bistro in town, right on the main street for staring at people, is **Les Deux Garçons,** cours Mirabeau; but a lot of visitors are now returning to **La Rotunde,** 24 place Jeanne d'Arc, which was closed for a *relooking*. It's now a restaurant, bar, cafe, and meeting place.

Shopping in Aix

Aix has a lot of shops besides Souleiado and Les Olivades that specialize in Provençal cute; they sell mostly fabric and clothing. Other vendors offer clay pots, earthenware, garden furniture, and sundials. You get the drift. Take a look at **Terre è Provence** (6 bis rue Aude) for a big hunk of the local look and more pottery than you've ever dreamed of (this is a chain). You're gonna go nuts for one of the newest stores in town, **Le Faubourg** (5 rue Aude)—a home shop that has moderate prices and Provençal styling that works outside of Provence.

One block over, on the rue Fauchier, there's a branch of **L'Occitane** (no. 10), which sells its own line of bath and soap products as well as other brands. You can also buy soap from stalls in the market . . . or at the new branch of **La Compagnie de Provence,** a Marseille soap source (63 rue des Cordeliers).

There's a good branch of the makeup kingdom **Sephora** located right inside the **Passage Agard** but with the street address 12 rue Fabrot—the passage is one of the alleys leading from the place Verdun to cours Mirabeau. Don't miss it for architectural cuteness and charm galore.

The best antiques are found on the rue Jaubert and the rue Granet, both of which are on the other side of the Palais de Justice from the marketplace. Check out **Le Paris d'Helene** (4 rue Jaubert) for the fancy stuff. There are some junky antiques and *brocante* stores on the rue David, which leads right into the market square.

Shopping Hours

Most stores open at 10am and close for lunch at 12:30pm. Antiques dealers and factory shops open at 9am or even earlier. Stores reopen at 2pm and stay open until 7pm. **Monoprix** does not close for lunch. Most stores are also closed on Monday morning, though TTs stay open Monday morning and during lunch. Aix is not totally dead on Monday, which is a blessing.

Finds

Chocolaterie de Puyricard
7 rue Rifle-Rafle.

Come here for chocolates from the nearby village of Puyricard, with a national rep as among the best in France. Almost 100 different types!

Les Olivades
15 rue Marius Reinaud.

The same but so different in terms of Soleiado and *les tissus Indiennes* (Provençal fabrics made from woodblocks first brought from India)—more vibrant, more trendy fashion oriented, with touches designed by Christian Lacroix. The line is now sold through Pierre Deux stores in the U.S.

Santons Fouque
63 rue Gambetta.

Within the town of Aix, but outside the immediate tourist downtown, on the rue Gambetta—which is a main artery leading into and out of town—is this *santon* maker which you might want to track down. The shop is open from 8am to noon and 2 to 6:30pm; also open some Sundays in late November and into December, for the Christmas season. Call ✆ **04-42-46-33-38** for an appointment.

Souleiado
8 place des Chapeliers.

A stunner: This is one of the largest Souleiado stores in the region, selling both clothes and home style.

Un Ete en Provence
2 rue Jaubert.

A fancy TT that specializes in local pottery and *boutis*—French bed quilts that can be hand- or machine-made, a differential in their cost and value. This shop has a nice selection of handmade *boutis*.

Markets, Festivals & Fairs

Market days in Aix are Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. The market is a complicated thing, with various parts to it: fruits and veggies to one side, *brocante* to the other. The flower part of the market is half a block away, and dealers selling new clothes and cheap imports from India spill onto cours Mirabeau on Saturday. If you approach town this way and see these vendors first, you will wonder who in the world ever thought this town had a special market. You might even miss the good part of the market, near the Palais de Justice, because it is rather well hidden.

There's a big antiques salon in November and a *santon* fair in December.

Out of Town

The village of **Puyricard,** outside Aix, is interesting because it's home to the famous chocolate factory of the same name as well as the tile factory, **Carocim.** Carocim makes modern versions of old-fashioned cement tiles. You can make an appointment to see the showroom by calling ✆ **04-42-92-20-39;** check it out online at www.carocim.com.

APT

This is not the cutie-pie village you might think it is—the town is more like a city and is large enough to get lost in. There is an excellent market on Saturdays, but it's mobbed in season. Get there early, or forget it until September.

ARLES

Arles and Nîmes are considered twin cities, although they do not rest on opposite sides of a river, like Buda and Pest or Minneapolis and St. Paul. Nîmes is the real-people town and Arles is more touristy; both have Roman ruins, but Nîmes has much more shopping (p. 214).

Art historians think of Arles and say "van Gogh," while fashion victims scream "Lacroix"—the fashion designer who comes from Arles and is so well known for his Provençal touch that he designed the decoration on the TGV Med trains.

Either way, Arles stands for color and pattern and a splash of heat mixed with much passion. Arles is much more touristy than Nîmes, and it's also smaller. As for shopping—well, this isn't where you do any major shopping; it's more where you wander around and see some tiny shops or craftspeople or possibly luck into something you've been searching for.

Good News/Bad News

The good news first: Lots of stores are open on Sundays during fair weather. Now the bad news: There is a terrific **Monoprix,** handily located right at the place Lamartine where barges come to port—and it's closed on Sundays.

Getting Around Arles

You can enjoy a stroll and see it all, but we're talking a big stroll. You may want to try the Petit Train, one of those tourist trains that stops at all the highlights.

Shopping in Arles

Shopping Neighborhoods

MAIN DRAG The boulevard des Lices (which becomes the av. Victor Hugo) is the main street through the heart of town, passing the Jardin d'Été before stretching itself out into real-people land. Behind this very nice garden (especially fun on Sun for a very French feel) lie the Théâtre Antique and, beyond that, the Roman Amphitheater.

CUTIE PIE At a perpendicular angle to the boulevard des Lices lies the smallish rue Jean Juarès, which is the main retail street for name brands, of which there are only a few.

REPUBLIQUE The town hall is at the place de la République, from which the rue de la République stretches off toward the river, with some mom-and-pop and French brand retail along the way. This is a pedestrian street.

MAYOR'S DRAG Right around the town hall is the rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, a pedestrian-only street for shoppers. If you follow this street away from boulevard des Lices and toward the river, you'll be parallel to the famed place du Forum.

PLACE DU FORUM Pushed back into the middle of nowhere, somewhat hidden between shopping breaks, is this adorable square with the two most famous hotels in town (do have a look-see: Le Nord-Pinus and l'Hôtel Forum) as well as the Café Van Gogh. Stores are all around.

AMPHITHEATER There are scads of TTs in a row encircling the Roman Amphitheater—if you're wandering these back streets, follow the rond point des Arènes (the street that goes around the building) and look for signs to THEATRE ANTIQUE and place Bornier. This will lead you past many shops selling fabrics and pottery, plus a few that offer specialty foods from the area (you have loaded up on bull sausage, haven't you?).

FINDS

LES ETOFFES DE ROMANE
10 bd. des Lices.

This looks like a TT (and it is), but it's got great items made from Provençal-style fabrics—and the prices are the best in the south. This store is also larger than most, and while the fabrics are not of the quality of the big names in *tissus Indiennes,* they do not all look cheap or tacky—as can happen. Open Sundays.

SOULEIADO
4 bd. des Lices.

This branch of Souleiado had items I couldn't find in Nîmes—I got the bed linen I wanted. The staff couldn't be nicer and pulled things down from high shelves for me. Open on Sundays in season.

AVIGNON

This is the part of the book where we all burst into song: *"Sur le pont d'Avignon, l'on y danse . . ."* You, too, will be dancing when you get to Avignon, but not on the bridge. In fact, you may not know that it's not really a bridge—it's half a bridge. It just sort of juts out into the water and ends. People walk to the end, look down, and then walk back and tell their relatives they've been there and done that.

Getting to Avignon

Avignon has two train stations: **Avignon Centre** and **Avignon TGV.** There is shuttle-bus service between the two. If you take the TGV Méditerranée here, you will arrive at Avignon TGV, a very architecturally interesting station that looks like half of a flying saucer. Note that the Avignon TGV station has two fronts, marked North and South; if you're meeting people

here, you'd better agree ahead of time exactly which door, as it can be confusing.

Trains to both Avignon stations leave Paris from the Gare de Lyon. However, the train to Avignon TGV takes just under 2½ hours, while the train to Avignon Centre takes almost 4 hours.

The Lay of the Land

The town of Avignon is bigger than you think and has many parts to it; in fact, Avignon is the hub city of this part of Provence. But that's for real people. Tourists and visitors will be most interested in the city that lies within the old walls, *centre ville*—the cutie-pie part.

If you're driving, head for the walls and enter the city through any of the gates. Like all medieval cities, Avignon has true walls and is built in concentric circles. There are no grid streets whatsoever, and only the teeny center of the circle has any kind of sense to it. The whole city within the walls is a warren of tiny streets that are all one-way—*bonne chance*. The bigger rental cars won't even make some of the corners. I know from experience.

If you're lucky, you'll enter town through the Porte de la République (across the street from the main train station). By entering through this gate, you're on the cours Jean Jaurès, which becomes the rue de la République, the main shopping street. It dead-ends into the place de l'Horloge. Park as soon as you are able, even if it means paying for a garage.

Sleeping in Avignon

HOTEL D'EUROPE
12 place Crillon.

This is a great choice, right in the center of town. The restored old hotel is decorated with tapestries and offers two wonderful terraces for meals or drinks—your choice of view. There are 44 rooms and 3 suites; prices average around 261€ ($300) per night. There's also a nice restaurant on the property. Local phone **✆ 04-90-14-76-76.** www.hotel-d-europe.fr.

La Mirande

4 place de la Mirande.

Oh me, oh my, where's the camera, where's the *Architectural Digest* crew? This is one of the most magnificent properties in France; you can sleep, eat, sip, snack, go to cooking classes, or just shop in the owner's little boutique in the basement. Try all, but not at the same time.

Each guest room is different, but all are decorated with the Provençal charm you were hoping for. The kitchen is also famous, so you might want to save up for a meal even if you aren't staying here. You can eat in the dining room or on the terrace; there is also a sunroom where tea and snacks are served. The full lunch for two people, along with a glass of wine and some iced tea, was about 100€ ($115) last summer . . . and worth every penny. Room rates begin at 250€ ($288). Local phone ✆ **04-90-85-93-93.** Fax 04-90-86-26-85.

Eating in Avignon

Le Cloitre des Arts

83 rue Joseph Vernet.

This is a two-part establishment: part gastronomic restaurant and part quick-bite joint. It's very Starck-meets-medieval, quite spectacular and splendid. For reservations, call ✆ **04-90-85-99-04.**

Nani

Rue de la République (at rue Théodore Aubanel).

This is the perfect soup-and-sandwich kind of cute local cafe, right off the main shopping street. You can eat upstairs or on the street level. Choose from salads, quiches, potato tarts, and local fare. No credit cards.

Shopping in Avignon

The fancy shopping street in town is rue Joseph Vernet, which veers off to the left from the rue de la République, right across the street from the tourist office. It is to your left if the tourist

office is to your right, and the "old" train station is behind you.

Your basic multiples are on the main street, rue de la République: There is a newly refurbished **Monoprix** (what more does any shopper need?), as well as branch stores of those essentials like **FNAC, Zara,** and **Sephora.** There are also some crepe stands and tourist traps. The big stores are open during lunch; Monday mornings are not totally dead. The best store in town is located in the basement of La Mirande (see above): It's the hotel gift shop, so it has no official name, but it sells style by the yard, the house brand of olive oil, children's clothing, tabletop and decorative items, and other things of whimsy the owner finds.

Among the stores you'll find on the rue Joseph Vernet are **Laurèl, Georges Rech, Cacharel, Ventilo,** and **Façonnable.** There are also assorted boutiques for everything from jeans to Japanese droop. The big names are concentrated on the part of the rue Joseph Vernet that is almost directly parallel to the place de l'Horloge; get there via the rue St-Agricol, which has become the fanciest street in town. There are several other shops here, including a renovated branch of **Hermès** (no. 7).

All the little streets clustered around rue Joseph Vernet—including rue de la Petite Fusterie, rue Limas, and place de Lunel—have charming and wonderful stores. Many of them are antiques shops; rue de la Petite Fusterie seems to concentrate on home style. When you see the local matrons walking around with their fabric swatches, you'll think of every Judy Krantz book you've ever read; this part of Avignon feels a lot like Beverly Hills.

On the other side of the place de l'Horloge, leading toward place Pie, is rue Marchands, the town's second-tier leading shopping street. You'll find **Les Olivades** here, as well as assorted other real-people shops, including **Foot Locker.** This is a pedestrian area where you can amble and browse.

Surrounding the place du Palais de Papes are several TTs, some of which are rather fancy and good fun. I like **Avignon Souvenirs** (7 place du Palais) because it has very classy giftwares.

Markets, Festivals & Fairs

Every day except Monday, there's a market, Aux Halles, at place Pie. There's also a supermarket there, in a small mall called Les Halles, as well as a public parking lot.

On Saturday morning, there's a *brocante* market at place Crillon. On Sunday morning, there is a flea market at place des Carmes, which is within walking distance of Aux Halles, but a little off center. Check your map.

Avignon is famous for its summer theater festival. There are also numerous big antiques salons and *brocante* fairs during the year. The annual pottery fair attracts some 30,000 visitors; it's hard to say which is more fun—the wares or the fact that you're shopping in the shadow of the Palais des Papes.

Out of Town

On the other side of the river, which you can reach by a whole bridge (not the famous half-bridge), lies the suburb of **Villeneuve-lès-Avignon,** which has a flea market on Saturday morning. You can get there by bus if you don't have a car.

In **Le Pontet,** a northern suburb, there's a giant commercial center that has all the big stores you would expect of an American suburb, including the *hypermarché* **Auchan** (the French version of Home Depot), **Leroy Merlin,** and many discounters, off-pricers, and outlet shops. There's a nice home store called **Alinéa** that has good prices on pottery and tabletop goods. It's not a charming shopper's heaven, but if you have a house or rent one, this is where you can load up.

DRÔME PROVENÇALE

The Drôme is a *département* of France, directly north of the Vaucluse yet somewhat south of Lyon. Most of the other sections in this chapter list individual cities, but the Drôme covers several towns that are all near one another (within an hour's drive) and make up a secret portion of Provence.

The part of this *département* closest to Vaucluse is called the Drôme Provençale. This is a great find: Few tourists know about it, yet the area is filled with wonderful castles, fields of lavender, great pottery towns, lots of *brocante*, and more olives than you can count.

You can get here via the A6 autoroute (exit for Nyons) or simply by continuing on past Vaison-la-Romaine (p. 226) in your travels—the border is just past Vaison, and the town of Nyons is a mere 10km (6 miles) from Vaison.

The villages below happen to be in alphabetical order, but are also, by coincidence, listed from north to south. I have not included the city of Montélimar in the listings because it is large and not one of those charming little villages you want to know about, as the others are. Well, actually, there are parts of Montélimar that are charming.

Nougat freaks, however, may want to go to Montélimar for visits to various nougat factories. Nougat is also sold at stores and highway rest stops throughout this region.

DIEULEFIT One of the most famous pottery towns in Provence, Dieulefit also has a few good antiques fairs throughout the summer. They're listed in any of the monthly antiques guides. Most people come here to visit the various pottery shops that dot the road into town.

GRIGNAN This town is most famous for its castle, whose mistress (the countess of Grignan) was the daughter of Mme. Sevigne, the woman who wrote her daughter detailed letters describing life at court in Paris in the mid 1700s. As a result, there is an annual Festival de la Correspondance each summer as well as a museum of letters. Grignan is the tiny, adorable, picture-postcard village you've dreamed of finding.

There are various other events throughout the summer, including two evening markets in which the artisans who attend are dressed in costume. The party goes on until 2am. These evening markets are held on Friday nights, usually one in mid-July and one in early August. For exact dates, contact the tourist office (✆ **04-75-46-56-75;** ot.paysdegrignan@wanadoo.fr).

The town of Grignan is not large and can be walked; you can climb up to the château and shop your way there. This is a circular village, but most of the stores are easy to find and include all the artsy little boutiques you could want, along with purveyors of *brocante,* pottery, and even some fashion. Market day is Tuesday; there's truffle market from November until March.

NYONS Nyons is perhaps the most commercial of the villages, in that there's a well-known American cook, **Lydie Marshall** (www.lydiemarshall.com), who owns a château where you can stay and cook. There are also other small guesthouses, some of which do promotions based on the seasons—such as a truffle weekend or even a well-being weekend (go to www.uneautremaison.com or call ✆ **04-75-26-43-09**). The truffle weekend includes three truffle markets, two nights' stay, two dinners, and one truffle hunt with dogs, all for 400€ ($460).

The part of Nyons you'll be interested in is the Old City. It is easily walked, although the area has more sprawl to it than you might think. Don't miss the area alongside the river named promenade de la Digue, which has an olive-oil mill called **Les Vieux Moulins à Huile** (no. 4), a lavender mill called **Distillerie Bleu Provence** (no. 58), and some TTs (tourist traps). The scent of the lavender as it is being distilled will fill your soul.

Market days are Thursday throughout the year and Sunday from April until September. Sundays are mobbed, as this is one of the best Sunday markets in the area.

For real-people needs, there are two excellent supermarkets right in the heart of town as well as a branch of **Monoprix** (which has no grocery store).

FORCALQUIER

Forcalquier is not far from Manosque in eastern Provence. Comparisons end there—this village is everything I wanted Manosque to be, and it's one of the most perfect little dream towns of Provence. It is also the headquarters of **Oliviers & Co.,** the

olive-oil firm, and **zChocolat,** the Internet firm that distributes handmade chocs.

Note that this town is more "up" than others and is in the Alpilles. Forcalquier is small, but it's big enough to have an upper medieval city (enter by the obelisk; you can walk). If there's no market (every Mon morning) or crafts fair going on in the main square, you'll want to go into the old town for shopping.

The town is very real and yet has great stores, including a branch of **Oliviers & Co.,** several fabric and home-style shops, and two branches of the home store **La Terraio,** one of which is the cutest store in town. The town of Mane, just outside Forcalquier, is where the O&Co. offices are located; there's a mill there, too. Also check out **La Boutique,** for country textiles—many are heavy canvas or linen for home furnishings.

Finds

Henri Bardouin/Distilleries et Domaines de Provence

Forcalquier.

This is not quite a factory outlet, but you can call it a factory-owned store. It sells all the brands of pastis and liqueurs made by Henri Bardouin, which is one of the more famous lines. The store is on a side street; you can see the still outside. The decor is cute and the store obviously caters to tourists, who've come to buy the distilled tastes of Provence.

Oliviers & Co.

Av. de la Burlière, Mane.

This is the mother *moulin* for the Oliviers & Co. business, although there is no factory-outlet store because O&Co. does not discount olives or olive products. It still makes a great visit.

zChocolat Factory

www.zchocolat.com.

zChocolat has no store, so you can order online and just enjoy or you can call ahead and make an appointment. *Born to*

Shop (and Bonjour Paris website) readers are invited to tour the factory and buy directly while there.

Now then, about the product: The chocolates are not made at the factory but at several places around the region. Each maker makes only his specialties, which the execs at Z have tasted, tested, and voted on. I did a taste test and was knocked out by the quality. You get a very unique range of tastes of Provence, including a lavender chocolate and a local almond chocolate that is not found elsewhere.

Visit www.zchocolat.com to see for yourself. To get directions and make an appointment, e-mail zchocolat@zchocolat.com. If you are not going to show for the appointment, be kind enough to cancel. The phone number is ✆ **04-42-91-43-65.**

L'ISLE SUR LA SORGUE

If it's *Dimanche* (Sunday), this must be L'Isle sur la Sorgue, so *bon dimanche,* everyone, and welcome to the best Sunday in Provence.

Note: This is a Sunday that needs to be carefully planned, as French towns that are open on Sunday are few and far between, and you wouldn't want to sleep late and miss all the action. Things do dry up by around 1pm. L'Isle sur la Sorgue has a flea market and food market on Sunday only; on Saturday and Monday, the antiques dealers are open, but there are no markets. It is hard to understand the difference until you see it all in action . . . and read the following:

- Parking in this town is very difficult; get there early and use the **Spar** (a local supermarket) parking lot. You'll be charged 2€ ($2.30) to park, but it will be worth it.
- If you're planning on grocery shopping, don't forget to bring a tote bag or your own little French string bag. This is France, remember? Each package will be wrapped in its own small fashion, but you will not be given any carrier bags.

- Not all toilets are up to American standards. Have tissues in your handbag and be prepared for stand-up bathrooms (that is, wear a skirt).
- Learn your shipping options early in the game.
- Carry a notebook and pen, take notes, and memorize this phrase: *Je suis marchand*. It means "I am a buyer" and it entitles you to an automatic 20% to 25% discount off the asking price. Taking notes is the most convincing part.
- Speak some French; it's not essential, but it makes everything work better, including discounts.

The Lay of the Land

For a village you've never heard of, L'Isle la Sorgue is surprisingly big and stretches along the banks of the Sorgue River—hence the name. It is also a bit confusing at first.

The high street for antiques dealers runs alongside the river. The village is on the other side of the river from the main road, so you really have two parts of town right there. You might do a drive-through along the main drag first, although finding parking will be hard—you may want to grab any available space. Trust me.

The main part of the flea market is the *brocante* market, which is held every Saturday and Sunday, no matter what the weather, and lies at the far end of town along the riverbank. There are about 50 dealers. But don't fret. Antiques shops, some cafes, and some antiques warehouses line the high street on the nonriver side. The name of this street changes frequently but is most often written as avenue des 4 Otages. There are some 200 dealers in permanent digs. Many are in buildings that are behind buildings or in little villages set up over tiny bridges on or around a courtyard. The scene is far deeper than you can imagine at first glance, and the shopping is also far more serious than you can imagine.

The *centre ville* lies on the other side of the river from the antiques shops. The main shopping street of the inner village is called the rue de la République. A fruit, vegetable, and food market runs along the quay side, on the *centre ville* side of the river on Sundays; this is called the quai de Jean Jaurès.

Numerous bridges—some for cars, some for pedestrians—connect the two parts of town. The river is not very wide.

Eating in L'Isle

There are scads of cafes along the river and even on the sidewalk; several markets also have restaurants or cafes. If it's market day, you can picnic; otherwise, you might want to try **Le Café du Village** (village des Antiquaires de la Gare, behind the Spar market).

Shopping in L'Isle

ABOUT SHIPPING There are several shipping agents in town; just wander in and have a chat. Essentially, it's easy but expensive—price is determined by cubic measurement, not weight, so you can buy a large piece of furniture and fill it with stuff, and it will cost no more to ship than it would to send only the large piece of furniture. That's the good news. The bad news is that prices begin at 435€ ($500) per 1 cubic meter, and that does not include packing, insurance, or clearing U.S. Customs, let alone getting from the port of entry into your dining room. My advice? Take excess baggage on the plane, which costs less. Or buy a house nearby.

SHOPPING HOURS Things get going around 9am on Saturday and Sunday. Dealers start to set up at 8:30am, but that first hour is sort of lazy, so there's no need to rush. Just about everything in town is open on Sunday morning. The food market closes at 1pm on Sunday, as do most of the local shops, but the dealers and the flea market go on until 6pm.

Note: The *brocante* market is on both Saturday and Sunday, but the food market in the streets runs only on Sunday.

I wouldn't bother with this town anytime except the weekend, and then maybe I'd come for a whole weekend. You can spend Saturday with the regular dealers (many of whom are open only on weekends), and Sunday with the market and the dealers you missed or want to visit again.

If you're in town just for a Sunday, arrive by 10am and shop all day, but plan to buy your Sunday dinner as a picnic before the market closes at 1pm. They'll put your rotisserie chickens in hot-bags for you. Just store in your car, as you will make many trips to the car during the day anyway.

While you're roaming the streets, choose your luncheon spot and reserve a table so that you can return by 1 or 1:15pm. You'll probably want to stop by your car to drop off groceries and other loot before you sit down to lunch. Many places have regulars who know the drill. (I was belittled in French for not knowing the routine at the place I chose for lunch once.)

Dealers are open on Monday. And many are open *sur rendez vous,* which means you call ahead and make an appointment for a time and date other than when the store is open. You need to speak French.

MARKETS & FAIRS *Brocante* markets are Saturday and Sunday. Market days are Thursday and Sunday (mornings only). There are two big antiques fairs during the year: one at Easter and the other during the few days around August 15, which is a holiday in France (Feast of the Assumption). You can contact the fair organizers (✆ **04-94-03-40-72;** fax 04-94-31-27-25) for exact dates.

FINDS Many of the dealers in town are famous and sought after by buyers from all over the world. Perhaps the most famous is **Michel Biehn** (7 av. des 4 Otages), who is an expert in textiles and Provençal fabrics and costumes. Biehn's shop is in a freestanding house. It is one of the best stores in France and sells far more than regional textiles. Francine, of **La Boutique de Francine** (1 rue Julien-Guigue), is also big on fabrics and lace.

Numerous buildings are marked as if they are *brocante* fairs unto themselves. Take a look at **Brocante 11** (11 av. des 4 Otages). Also check out **Isle Aux Brocante** (nos. 7 and 4), where you can shop and eat lunch.

LOURMARIN

Lourmarin has a fabulous, fabulous, fabulous market on Fridays. It's very crowded, but with items you might not have seen before. Count on lots of walking because of the inability to park your car in the actual village. The town itself is another one of those picture-postcard perfections: small, quaint, cutie-pie. It's not far from Roussillon, Apt, and the heart of the Luberon area.

MANOSQUE

I had heard about Manosque and expected it to be delish to look at and marvelous to shop. I was quite annoyed to find that it is a large city, its medieval core is cute but not very cute, and the shopping is less than so-so. With that understanding, this is a pinpoint on the map, not a destination, and it is near many places you'll want to be.

Finds

LE MOULIN DE L'OLIVETTE
Place de l'Olivette.

This olive oil has won many awards. The *moulin* itself is a rather dressed-up TT, but it's still fun. The location is perfect; you'll have to pass by anyway on your way to Forcalquier. The shop sells oil on tap to locals and in bottles for tourists; it also carries soap, books, gifts, pastis, and other goodies. The shop is open Monday through Saturday from 8am to noon and 2 to 6pm. From April through September, the afternoon hours are 2:30 to 6:30pm.

L'Occitane Factory Store
ZI St-Maurice.

Before you wet your pants with anticipation and toss down this guide to book a shopping tour, there are a few things you need to know about this factory shop.

First off, it's very cute and easy to shop, it gift-wraps for free, and it has tons of stuff. But the discount is from 10% to 25%—and that's off French prices, not U.S. prices, which is not my idea of a real bargain.

Second, this outlet is a true factory store, located right on the factory grounds. It's in an industrial park (ZI, *zone industriel,* in French). Although the address reads Manosque, the shop is actually in the greater Manosque metro area, across the river, so you have to make a special driving trip to get here to save little money.

Third, all the tags say FACTORY STORE on them, so you can't pass off gifts to others as anything but a discounted product.

Hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm, Saturday from 9am to 1pm. For information, you can try e-mailing trecouvret@loccitane.fr. To get here, take the A51 north to exit 18, Manosque. When you get to the roundabout, turn right onto D901. Cross the highway; at the next roundabout, look for the sign to ZI St-Maurice. Finally, after you've made the turn to the ZI St-Maurice, the road forks: Go to the right. If you go left, you will come up to the rear of the factory, think it's closed, and be mad at me.

MAUSSANE-LES-ALPILLES

This town is simply known as Maussane and is near enough to St-Rémy that they are often visited (and shopped) together.

Boutique Jean Martin, 8 rue Charloun-Rieu, sells local foodstuffs, while **Moulin Jean-Marie Cornille,** rue Charloun-Rieu, is a local olive-oil mill. Jean-Pierre Démery, of the family that founded and until recently owned Souleiado, now has a small restaurant in town called **Centre Ville.**

MENERBES

This is one of those adorable villages that makes you love the world a little bit more—it's also the original village that Peter Mayle wrote about in his first book and is the home of the Truffle Museum, this being one of the truffle market cities in wintertime. To add to that, Ménerbes is the location of **La Bastide de Marie** (p. 163), one of the fanciest hotels in the area. I call Ménerbes the Beverly Hills of Provence, as it has a superficial layer of perfection to it that isn't very rustic, but rather is distilled to weed out reality.

NIMES

Nîmes and Arles are quite close to each other; Nîmes serves as much more of the commercial shopping area of the two. There is a branch of every major French multiple in Nîmes, and the town has many different shopping districts.

The Lay of the Land

Nîmes has a local airport as well as a train station (beware, it's hard to get taxis at the station!) and is actually the French gateway to Barcelona—a mere 3 hours away. The Spanish influence comingles with the Provençale, and before you can say *olé,* you notice that this part of France is somewhat different from others—even from other parts of Provence.

In fact, Avignon—which is not that far away—is considered the heart of one part of Provence, while Nîmes often claims it's located in southwestern France. Go figure. You'll see the differences reflected in local merchandise. (No bull!)

If you're driving and looking for the real world and the big-box stores, take the Nîmes Ouest exit on the autoroute.

Carrefour is open from 9am to 10pm—and has good prices on gas.

Getting Around Nîmes

Walk, but don't dismiss a taxi or a tour if offered—just for the opportunity to see the various parts of Nîmes and how they connect (especially if you're staying for a few days). Even the city center is larger than you think: There could be a fabulous flea market just 2 blocks from your hotel in an odd direction that you won't know about unless you really get out there. (***Hint:*** The Sat flea market is held 2 blocks from the Hotel Imperator.)

Sleeping in Nîmes

Hotel Imperator Concorde
Quai de la Fontaine.

One of the nicest hotels in town, this one is within walking distance of many shopping destinations; there's a big flea market in the other direction that's held each Saturday. You can dine outside in season. Rates begin around 100€ ($115). For U.S. reservations, call **Concorde Hotels** (✆ **800/888-4747**). Local phone ✆ 04-66-21-90-30. www.hotel-imperator.com.

Shopping in Nîmes

Shopping Neighborhoods

MAIN SHOPPING The main drag in town is rue Général Perrier, where the mass brands such as **Sephora** (no. 1) are located. Running perpendicular is the rue du Grand Couvent at one end and the rue de l'Aspic toward the other. The side streets are home to more upmarket brands and lead into the hidden parts. The mall is also on Perrier.

HIDDEN SHOPPING There's a medieval maze of streets between Monoprix and the Maison Carrée. Most of the stores are small, but there's a niche area of luxe, with such brands

as **YSL.** The rue de la Madeleine is another back street, very picturesque and running crosstown from the place aux Herbes.

CLOCK To explore the streets weaving around the place de l'Horloge, find the rue des Marchands for one end of the area . . . and use the rue de l'Horloge as another spoke.

PLACE DE LA MAISON CARREE This is the center of the tourist universe and brand-name shopping, including **Les Olivades** (no. 4) for Provençal style.

BOULEVARD SHOPPING Alongside the Maison Carrée (on the outside) lies boulevard Victor Hugo, which has some good shopping near the tourist areas, including a nice branch of **Souleiado,** no. 40.

FINDS

BOUTIQUE DES PASSIONNES
5 rue Jean Reboul.

This is right near the arena: an everything-bull shop.

LES INDIENNE DE NIMES
2 bd. des Arènes.

Head here for regional clothing designs. Closes at lunch.

MARKETS

FLEA MARKET Saturdays, at the Jardins de la Fontaine and boulevard Jean-Jaurès.

SPICE MARKET Outside, facing the street, under the eaves of FNAC at La Coupole des Halles.

LES HALLES A main-street mall with a fresh-food market on the ground floor and mall above. The market is open from 6:30am until 1pm, 7 days a week. The mall keeps regular store hours.

FLOWER MARKET Mondays, at Stade des Costières.

Out of Town: Nearby Outlets

Cacharel
Av. Maréchal Juin.

You need a car for this; you should also call ahead (✆ **04-66-02-01-38**) to verify. And yes, this was a big textile producing area: That's how denim *(tissus de Nîmes)* got its name!

Perrier
Vergèze.

Located on the RN113 between Nîmes and Montpellier, the Perrier factory has different hours depending on the season, but is open year-round and 7 days a week. Tastings are free.

ROMANS

Do not confuse Romans with Vaison-la-Romaine (p. 226), although obviously both owe something to Rome. But Romans is much more of a shopping capital—it is not only the home of all the shoe factories for the major French brands (yes, they have factory stores), but also the location of one of the Marques Avenue outlet malls.

Romans is one of those towns that is divided by a river (all commerce needs a river), so some of the shoe outlets are in the town of Bourg-de-Péage, just across the bridge.

To get here from Lyon, exit the A7 autoroute for Romans (exit 13); after you pay the toll, curve right to connect onto the D532, which will lead right into town. Note that it's not too far from the Valence TGV station if you prefer to come by train and then rent a car. Romans is also about a 1-hour drive south of Lyon.

Romans is set off the highway for a rather boring 15- to 20-minute drive, so relax. When you get to town, you will not be knocked out by its charm. Never mind. You didn't come

for the charm. Oh yes, there is a shoe museum, too (2 rue Ste-Marie).

On your way into town, you will pass a *hypermarché* named Hyper U; this is a good place to fill the tank with low-cost gas. Note that Romans has several different shopping areas, so don't underestimate the area to be shopped or the need for a car.

If you come from the Valence TGV, you will work in reverse, arriving first in Bourg-de-Péage via the A49. The sources listed below are in order of discovery if you are coming from Lyon.

Finds

CHARLES JOURDAN

Parc Affaires espace Mossant, Bourg-de-Péage.

To get to this large Charles Jourdan store, which is in downtown Bourg-de-Péage, follow signs out of Romans, across the river Isère, and voilà, look to your left immediately.

With McDonald's next door, it's hard to know what more you could want. The selection here changes, as the line is in flux—Patrick Cox has moved in as design director. The store sells men's and women's shoes as well as a few handbags, small leather goods and belts, and some leather clothing—suede shirt-jackets and shearling coats were on sale during my last visit.

JACQUELINE DHERBEYS

12 côte Jacquemart, Romans.

There are a few sources for sheets, towels, and domestic linens at Marques Avenue, but while in the area you might want to pop into this jobber, which sells the Laura Ashley and Dorma brands. The store is right near the Tour Jacquemart, a landmark from the 15th century.

MARQUES AVENUE

60 av. Gambetta, Romans.

This is an American-style mall in that it resembles a village, although not a cutie-pie fake one—it simply has walkways that

take you past all the stores. Among my favorites here is the Amor Lux outlet, which sells the colored fisherman's striped T-shirts I like so much, but at half-price. There's also a Souleiado outlet and many fashion brands such as GR (Georges Rech), Apostrophe, Ines de la Fressange, Ventilo, Tara Jamon, and Regina Rubens.

To get to this mall, you most likely will have to drive past it and then circle back at the next roundabout. Facilities include a large free parking lot and clean bathrooms; there is a small cafe for snacks but nothing grand.

Hours are Monday from 2 to 7pm, Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 7pm, and Saturday from 9:30am to 7pm. Closed on Sundays.

Robert Clergerie

Rue Pierre Curie and av. Duchesne, Romans.

As you drive into town, you'll see a large sign for this outlet, so don't panic by the lack of street address. The factory takes up the entire block and therefore has no exact address.

This is a real factory store in a real factory, selling the Robert Clergerie brand for women and the J. Fenestrier brand for men. Most shoes cost around 90€ ($104), with handbags closer to 150€ ($173). Everything is half-price and to swoon for. Women's sizes go up to 40½, men's to size 45.

For more shoes, head to the street called **côte des Cordeliers,** where there's another Clergerie shop and different factory stores (try no. 6 and no. 18) for brands such as Paraboot and Hardrige.

Stephane Kelian

Espace Mossant, Bourg-de-Péage.

This store is in the same strip center as Charles Jourdan and a few other off-price stores. The line is now designed by Alain Tondowski, who has worked for several big names and launched his first collection in spring 2004.

ST-ETIENNE-DU-GRES

Forget about town—you're here for **Les Olivades** factory shop (chemin des Indienneurs, St-Etienne-du-Grès; ✆ **04-90-49-19-19**), a freestanding building at the rear of the factory that makes all the sensational *tissus Indiennes* prints for this famous firm; there is parking in the rear as well.

The outlet is open on Monday morning, which totally shocked (and delighted) me; hours are Monday through Thursday from 9am to noon and 2 to 6pm. The factory shop accepts Visa, wraps gifts, and can fetch an English-speaking salesperson if needed.

The selling space is compact, neat, and filled with color and merchandise of all sorts and prices. The best bargains are in a few bins and baskets with things crumpled into them.

There is no question that you should shop here rather than at the Souleiado factory outlet.

Note: Once a year Les Olivades has a whopper of a sale—the staff closes the factory store and opens all the warehouses and factory spaces. Boxes overflow with bathing suits, racks are hung with clothes, bolts of fabric are piled into a corner. Prices are as low as 30€ ($35) for a dress, 20€ ($23) for a bathing suit. Call to ask the date of this annual sale; it's usually mid-July and falls on a weekend, with Sunday shopping hours of 9am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm. Yes, they'll still close for lunch.

ST-REMY-DE-PROVENCE

St-Rémy is a unique town in Provence because although it's almost perfect, it doesn't have the fake feel that some villages in the Luberon have adopted. It *is* touristy and could be ruined soon, but at this point, it's one of the few places in greater Provence that has some soul left. This small town offers just the right combination of real-people funk and cute perfection.

It also has one of my favorite chocolatiers in France (Joël Durand), so I drool at the very thought of St- Rémy.

Walking around the town, window-shopping, poking in and out of Souleiado, touching this and that, and buying postcards is a dream because you have the sense that, at last, you have found your own village . . . even if Princess Caroline found it first.

The handful of stores that are good are really good and really different and really able to touch you in a way that no TT can ever do; this is also a good town for foodies.

The Lay of the Land

Like many medieval towns, St-Rémy is built in a circle. Once you're inside the circle, the town has a semblance of a grid system, but there are still blind curves, dead ends, and alleys to nowhere. Fun, huh?

Most of the shopping, especially the more obvious and touristy stuff, is on the boulevard Gambetta, the rue Lafayette, the avenue de la Libération, and the boulevard Mirabeau. The best store in town is possibly **Le Grand Magasin,** 24 rue de la Commune (see below). **Souleiado,** 2 rue d'Résistance, is on one of the main drags of the grid. **Les Olivades** is located at 28 rue Lafayette. The circle that encloses the town is small, so you can just park and ramble. The street that forms the circle is named boulevard Victor Hugo; it has a surprising number of excellent shops on it.

Shopping in St-Rémy

Finds

Ebene
38 bd. Victor Hugo.

My friend Valerie from Carpentras sent me here for "Le Look": home furnishings and high Provençal style. Ebène is a photo op (it's in an old mill) and a chance to really understand what French style is all about—and how to make it work for you.

FLORAME
34 bd. Mirabeau.

This is the new gal in town—a brand with distribution throughout France along with its own store. You'll find aromatherapy products to make you smile . . . in and out of the bathroom.

HUILE DE MONDE
16 bd. Victor Hugo.

This shop is in a mansion, set back from the street and a little forbidding-looking, but don't be stopped—it's great fun and worth the extra few steps. Each salon of the mansion's ground floor is filled with oil and olive-oil products from producers from, yep, all over the world. Do not confuse this store with Oliviers & Co., although it does sell some of the O&Co. products, along with many other brands.

JOEL DURAND
3 bd. Victor Hugo.

I dream of Joël Durand. To be more precise, I dream of Joël Durand's lavender-and-chocolate concoction, which is now known as the letter *L* ever since he switched from a numerical system to an alphabetical one. All the little squares of his chocolate look alike, but each has a letter of the alphabet on it. You are welcomed into the shop, given a chart, and invited to choose a candy to taste. If you want to taste all 26, you can buy a box that contains one of each kind.

Meanwhile, besides the chocolate squares, the store sells chocolate bars, sauces in jars, *confitures* (jams), biscuits, and other delights. If you can't go on any longer without a fix, Joël will FedEx you whatever you crave.

Note that the shop is very, very air-conditioned. It's open daily: Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to 12:30pm and 2:30 to 7:30pm, Sunday from 10am to 1pm. There is a second shop in St-Paul-de-Vence, in the hills above the Côte d'Azur (p. 295). Durand speaks English.

Le Grand Magasin
24 rue de la Commune.

This is one of my favorite stores in France. It seems to sum up not only my own personality but also a piece of my soul. It's hard to actually categorize what the store sells other than to say "style," but in a fun way: You can find everything from bracelets to drinking cups to Christmas lights to decorative tin boxes to toys. There are little nooks and crannies in the rear of the store, so you can browse for quite some time. Don't drool on the stuff; it's rude.

By the way, don't let the name of the street throw you; it branches right off boulevard Victor Hugo, where all the good stores are; it's almost next door to the cookie shop.

Le Petit Duc
7 bd. Victor Hugo.

Don't eat too many chocolates when you visit Joel, or you will have no room for old-fashioned cookies, candies, and other baked goods from this fabulous little pastry shop that uses old-fashioned methods and recipes to re-create the lost tastes of grandmother's kitchen. If grandmother were French, of course. Le Petit Duc is a photo op, eating op, and gift op.

Lillimand
5 av. Albert Schweitzer.

This is a famous old French source for candied fruits. If you get too sticky on your visit, you can be hosed off. (Visitors often claim their feet stick to the sugar on the floor in the very old factory.) The firm was founded in the mid-1860s and is famous throughout France for its product.

Poivre d'Ane
25 bd. Victor Hugo.

This is another of the classy lifestyle stores that do the Provençal look with a deft touch.

Markets & Fairs

The St-Rémy market is held on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. There's a local arts-and-crafts fair on the last weekend in July, as well as a big celebration on August 15, which is a holiday in France (Feast of the Assumption). A small *brocante* market is open Tuesday through Sunday afternoons only, from 3 to 7pm, from the last weekend in November until Easter; it's held on the boulevard Gambetta (no. 19).

Out of town

Galerie de la Gare, route St-Rémy, Molleges Gare, is an antiques place (a happening that is too elaborate for me to call a store) on the outskirts of St-Rémy in an old train station, hence the name. You will drool the minute you pass by: The front yard is home to old bathtubs, statues, and pieces of style. The inside contains large pieces of furniture and everything else you can imagine. I find some prices high; still, you'll have a ball just looking and touching. It's open daily from 10am to noon and 3 to 7pm.

Olive-oil freaks may want to hunt down the **Moulin de Calanquet,** on the Old Arles road (vieux chemin d'Arles) but well outside downtown St-Rémy (about 5km/3 miles). Open daily from 9am to noon and 2:30 to 7pm.

Les Olivades has a factory shop right outside St-Rémy; see the section on St-Etienne-du-Grès, above.

SALON-DE-PROVENCE

I cannot send you to Salon-de-Provence with any more than a giggle and a warning. As a town, well, there is nothing here to write home about. I went in search of the best soap factory in France, **Savonnerie Marius Fabre** (148 av. Paul Bourret), which we found because my friend Karen refused to give up. I would have quit an hour beforehand.

Because this soap is sold all over France (and in many parts of the U.S.), I see no reason for you to go through all this just to shop at the factory store, where prices did not appear to be significantly lower than usual. However, if you want a soap tour, this is the best one in the region, and I know—I've done them all.

Visiting hours are Monday through Thursday from 10 to 11am. Boutique hours are Monday through Friday from 9:30am to noon and 1:30 to 4:30pm. Group tours can be arranged on request. Local phone ✆ **04-90-53-24-77.** www.marius-fabre.fr.

TARASCON

Serious shoppers have already marked Tarascon on their maps, secure in their knowledge that they have only one life to live and that they want to see the Souleiado factory before they die. Well, welcome to my honest opinion of Tarascon.

I love Tarascon. I love the Démery family—creators of the Souleiado prints (even though I don't know them, I love them). Their little museum on the premises of the factory is indeed worth seeing before you die. They have sold the company, but the museum ticks on.

The factory shop, however, is outrageously expensive, and the people who work there are notoriously rude. I cannot welcome you to shop there. But I do welcome you to browse. Then you can go to the museum, where you'll spend your money far better than you would on anything you can buy in the shop. The museum is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 3pm. The entrance fee is 5€ ($5.75) per person.

Note: Souleiado has a relatively new design director, Luc Vincent, who is making the line a little more mode and a little less what-I-wore-to-the-Provençal-fair. Each year, he hires a new designer to give the old fabrics a twist. There's both fashion and home style. There are still Souleiado stores in most major Provençal cities, so coming to Tarascon is more for the museum than anything else.

The Lay of the Land

You will probably enter town via the N99 and find yourself on the main shopping street for real people. (See that Monoprix? Don't you feel better now?) It's called cours Aristide Briand before it becomes the avenue de la République. This main street curves around the city and hits the water, and then you'll see a bridge. Don't cross the water unless you want to leave Tarascon. Park. Walk.

The main cute area is a cobbled pedestrian street called Les Halles. The tourist office is located here, as are a few real-people shops, such as the grocery store, the bakery, and Super Drug. Some of the stores are open on Monday morning (as is Monoprix, 2 blocks over).

Like all medieval towns, the city center here is a warren of squares that dead-end into nothing. Get a map.

Attention, Crafters

If you are seriously interested in the art of making a *boutis* (French quilt), there is a special class held in association with the museum. The package includes hotel, dinner, museum fees, and working in the atelier with embroidery experts. The price is about 300€ ($345) per person; call ✆ **04-90-59-49-36** for info.

VAISON-LA-ROMAINE

Vaison-la-Romaine is famous to the world because it has the largest unearthed Roman village in France; many Americans know it because the cookbook author and foodie Patricia Wells lives here and gives cooking classes from her château. I know it because I live here, too, but not in a château. In fact, my house is so tiny it's really an apartment—but what a view: I live next to the Roman ruins.

Vaison itself is not the most charming town in France or even one worth visiting, except for the ruins. One of the many good things about it, however, is that you can get the feel of real life in Provence. Because it's not overly cute, it's very real. And therein lies much of the charm.

One of the things I like about Vaison is that it functions like a city—so there's much of interest, ranging from shopping streets to several squares to an ancient Roman bridge to an upper and lower village and scads of ruins. On the edge of town, there are vineyards for tastings and all the côte du Rhone vines you can gaze lovingly at.

Vaison makes a good base for exploring the area, for wine tastings, and for taking in assorted Roman cities from here to Orange and beyond. The town has enough shopping opportunities to keep anyone happy—and there are two supermarkets. The Tuesday market, from 8am to 1pm, is becoming one of the largest in the area, and it sells absolutely everything. Get there early—it's hard to find parking.

Vaison is also quite close to the Drôme; Nyons is a mere 10km (6 miles) away (p. 206).

The Lay of the Land

One of Vaison's charms is that it is *atypique*. It is not a circular village, nor is it adorable. The city is divided into two parts by a river and a hill—the medieval city is up the hill and is very cute but closed to vehicular traffic, so wear your best walking shoes. There is not much shopping up there—just a few art galleries, cafes, and some chances to wonder what it would be like to live there.

Below, a Roman bridge leads into the heart of the real town, which is a series of streets backed up around place Montfort, the main square. One of the delights of Vaison is that the main square is not in the heart of town . . . or it's not

the only heart of town. The square is lined with cafes on one side, shops on the others, and a nearby pedestrian street called rue Grande offers yet more shopping.

Moving away from the square and the river, you'll come to the line of Roman ruins, divided into two portions cut apart by the post office and the tourist office. The tourist office has a store and even sells the local wines.

As you head away from town, you'll see a supermarket called **Super U;** past that a mile is a larger supermarket called **Intermarché,** which is a good place for cheap gas. Both of these markets carry more than food—they have health and beauty aids, garden supplies, clothes, books, maps, and more.

Finds

Alain et Annick Bertheas

Mas Belair, route Séguret (between Vaison and Séguret).

Although the south is filled with potters and it's not hard to fall in love with every pot ever thrown, I think you'll find Alain et Annick Bertheas's wares more sophisticated than most—and better able to make the transition from souvenirs to serious pieces.

Prices seem fair to me; I keep buying pieces as gifts and then keeping them for myself. The average for a good-size item falls between 26€ and 43€ ($30–$50). Business is so good that Alain no longer appears at many of the local pottery events, although he is in Séguret for the annual show there at the end of August. Note that Alain does not speak English and does not ship, though he will pack each piece in bubble wrap and box everything for you.

The atelier is well marked (POTIER) and lies halfway between Vaison-la-Romaine and Séguret. If you're driving from Séguret toward Vaison, look for the sign right after you pass the roundabout with the fake Roman arch in the center. The phone is **✆ 04-90-46-15-58.**

Hadrien 2000
Rue la Mexique, Vaison-la-Romaine.

This small gallery is in the heart of downtown Vaison, a block from place Montfort, the main square. All the wares are inspired by the Roman ruins; they're subtle, sophisticated, and worth every euro of the asking price. Unfortunately, the asking price is high (the good stuff costs about 1,000€/$1,150) and the items are so heavy that shipping could cost a fortune. Still, you should stop by just to stare.

Librarie Montfort
40 Grand Rue, Vaison-la-Romaine.

This excellent bookstore carries a large concentration of cookbooks and volumes on local color.

Plein Sud
24 av. Jules Ferry, Vaison-la-Romaine.

This store makes me think of Barneys in New York—not that it sells clothing or has anything to do with Barneys save the same elegance in display and style. While most local antiques shops look like either a jumble or grandmother's sitting room, this one feels light and stunning and chic. The sign outside the door says *objects trouves* (found objects), which defines the style. Closed for lunch from noon to 3pm, and all day Sunday and Monday.

Potterie de Crestet
Route Malaucène, Le Crestet.

This is mass-produced pottery, and it comes in amazing colors at such low prices, you'll consider booking a freighter to send yourself a container. This is a casual kind of market roadside stand/store, with wares laid out on the lawn and some tacky kitsch mixed in with the gems.

It's possible that this factory also makes the goods for the famed Emile Henry line of French cookware; more than half the stock is stamped Emile Henry—which sells at ABC Carpet for 20 times the price. I bought large blue mixing bowls for less than 8.70€ ($10) each.

The shop is open daily from 9am to noon and 2 to 7pm; it makes for great Sunday shopping. To get here, drive out of Vaison away from Ségerut, past the Point P hardware store, toward Malaucène.

Chapter Eight

SHOPPING THE RIVIERA: ST-TROPEZ TO NICE

WELCOME TO THE RIVIERA

The French Riviera isn't just a location—it's a state of mind. A few minutes among palm trees, blue seas, sparkling skies, mountain air, and topless beach bunnies, and nothing else seems real, let alone some of the amenities on those bunnies.

The Riviera is where the concept of Beverly Hills was born. It's where glamour was born. It's where resorts, in season, and postcards were born. The idea of having a suntan came from Cannes. It was none other than Coco Chanel who made being tan the in thing.

If we didn't have the Riviera, Coco Chanel would have invented it. Indeed, it was Chanel and Picasso and Gerald Murphy (whose motto was "Living well is the best revenge") and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald who resurrected the Riviera, reclaimed it from its posh Victorian past, and made it the playground of the Western world.

For over 80 years, the Riviera has been about red-carpet treatment for the nouveau riche, not only for stars and starlets, but also for anyone who can pay the tab. And these days, the bill may be discounted enough to enable just about anyone to revel in the field of dreams.

Naturally, where there's money and glamour of this caliber, there's also good shopping. You might say this is where the born-to-shop were born. Styles and trends are often born on the streets, or beaches, here; just where do you think it was that topless sunbathing came into fashion?

An evening stroll becomes a fashion show on the catwalk of life. Everyone makes a public appearance in the south of France—that's part of the attraction. What's worn on the streets is as exciting as what's shown on the mannequins. And what's not worn is more exciting still.

Step into the *douche autobronzant* (a shower that sprays you with fake tanning oil); fasten on your sandals. Take off your top during the day and pull out Le Wonderbra by night. And don't forget to visit the spa, drink lots of healthy water, apply bust cream, and use your cellulite spray. In between, we're going to shop and eat and promenade—and be French. Okay, so we'll fake the last part. That's part of what the Riviera is all about, too.

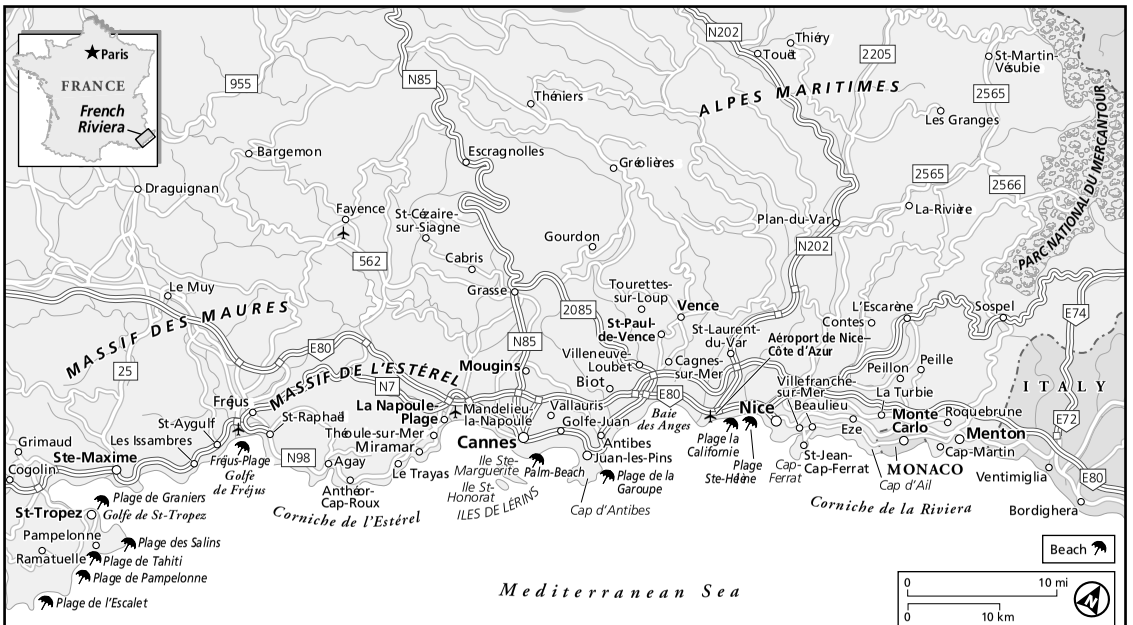
Getting to the Riviera

FROM THE U.S. Nice–Côte d'Azur International Airport (NCE) is the second busiest airport in France. I'm not sure if it was created to make my life better or just to boost Delta's bottom line, but if you are a south-of-France or Provence person, this airport was made for you and yours. Delta flies a daily nonstop to and from New York.

Delta has special winter promotions that include Nice—one of the few places where the weather is still balmy even when Europe has its off-price season. I got some "Starving Artists' Fares" coupons that made a round-trip ticket from New York to Nice a mere $399.

While technically you can also use the Marseille airport to get to the Côte d'Azur, it's not as convenient as Nice.

FROM PARIS You can travel to the Riviera through the Nice or the Marseille airport by booking a connection through



The French Riviera

Paris. This can be costly if you want to come in or out of one city and in or out of the other. If you're writing a through ticket, however, the add-on is not as expensive, but you probably don't get a layover in Paris and you do have connecting times and terminals to keep you in line.

You can also take the train from Paris; the TGV Méditerranée will get you to Marseille in 3 hours, and then you can go on to St-Raphaël (closest train station to St-Tropez), Cannes, Nice, or Monte Carlo.

FROM THE U.K. The boom in low-cost carriers has created scads of flights into southern France from various U.K. airports. Most of these are alternative airports, so know what you are doing and where you are going.

FROM ELSEWHERE IN THE E.U. Amsterdam is an additional hub for Air France/KLM these days, now that the two have married (financially, at least)—so you may want to price changing planes in Amsterdam, rather than Paris, en route to the south of France. Just a thought.

Getting Around the Riviera

BY RENTAL CAR Driving the autoroutes is fun and pretty easy, as long as you remember that these guys go fast. There has, however, been a new effort to cut speeds (and highway deaths), so watch out for radar and try to stick to the 130kmph (81 mph) speed limit on highways.

The biggest problems occur in small towns and during the summer. Parking can be a nightmare, but if you get a parking ticket, pretend you're French: Toss it away. There are a few tricks you will quickly grasp, like following signs that say OTHER DIRECTIONS and going around the roundabout a few times because you can't figure out which way to go.

BY PRIVATE TRANSPORT If being lost in the hills is not your thing, you might need some help. Enter my old buddy Piero Bruni, who now runs **E.T.S.** (✆ **04-92-98-06-29;** fax

04-92-98-98-58; PBruni@compuserve.com), which stands for Executive Transport Service. Piero and his wife, Martine, are my heroes: They provide all manner of airport transfers and transportation as well as complete tours of the Riviera (and Provence) from offices in Cannes. Piero speaks fluent English and spent years as a hotelier, so service is his business. E.T.S. has cars, limos, and vans; it does day trips and overnights to Italy and around Provence; and there's a special *Born to Shop* transfer rate from the Nice airport to Cannes (p. 248).

VIP Riviera Service (✆ **04-93-44-22-33;** fax 04-93-37-49-93) handles transportation needs in Monte Carlo, Nice, and Cannes for groups or for individuals, and it even does airport pick-ups. The office is open daily, 24 hours a day.

Markets & Fairs

The south of France is one big market. There are regular flea markets and then special events and salons, especially in Cannes and Monte Carlo. The happiest news is that there are terrific flea markets even on Monday—a day that can be totally dead for shoppers in many parts of France—every week, in and out of season.

For *brocante,* there's the **Marché Forville** in Cannes on Monday, with about 75 dealers. Also on Monday is the **Cours Saleya** in Nice, where some 250 dealers congregate. Brocante is sold in Grasse on Wednesday.

On Saturday in Cannes, there's a different flea market at the **Allées du Liberté,** right across the street from the Palais du Festivals in the heart of town. You'll find a few dozen *brocante* dealers at the Saturday market in St-Tropez. And *brocante* is sold on Thursday and Saturday at a teensy market in Antibes and on Sunday in Villefranche, which has two separate little markets—a perfect Sunday browse.

For a list of brocante in the towns you will visit, check out any of the magazines with listings—*Alladin* in the best known, but there's also *Chiner* and *Antiquites*.

Eastward Ho!

Note that the following sections in this chapter are arranged in roughly geographical order, starting with St-Tropez and heading east toward Nice.

ST-TROPEZ

Hang on to your bathing-suit top and welcome to St-Tropez, which got its reputation as the tony beach of the rich and famous in the early 1950s. St-Trop is the opposite direction down the beach from Monaco and actually has a very different kind of shopping from Monaco and Cannes . . . this is the funky kind of shopping.

St-Trop attracts so many tourists that the number-one sport here has to be staring at all those people and what they think passes as fashion. Okay, let me concede the point: Maybe the number-one sport is looking at the topless women and wondering why the ladies who should least go without a top are always the ones who are topless. But I digress. This is the village where being a little bit more outrageous than the next guy is part of a fashion statement, and where trends are set and reset with the changes in the tide.

If you're looking for more than a superficial thrill, head for the hills. If you want to get away from the parade, all you need do is head off on your own. First, get away from the port and those expensive cafes: Work your way through the winding warren of medieval streets in the Old Town, and then wander into the cute parts of the city flats. Venture even farther to the edges of town, where locals shop at the *hypermarché* (modern drygoods store) and tourists rarely dare to go. Better yet, book yourself into a resort and never leave (try the Villa Marie).

Real Francophiles will want to go to the *hypermarché, mais oui,* but they will crave much more. That's because St-Tropez is in Var, and Var really does reach into Provence.

The area surrounding St-Tropez represents some of the best of the real France. Salernes? Did someone say tile factories? Lorgues? You want a real market? You want to eat? And for heaven's sake, can we head for Gassin now?

Don't forget that once you've gotten yourself to Salernes, you're halfway to Moustiers-Ste-Marie, which is the home of the tiny inn owned by superchef Alain Ducasse (p. 162). But I don't want to push too hard on the Provence button; there are plenty of people who will do St-Tropez as a day trip from Cannes—the contrast between the two is worth experiencing, especially during the film festival.

To sum up, St-Tropez is a place unto itself, a different state of mind. There are Cannes people and there are St-Tropez people, sort of like Martha's Vineyard people and Nantucket people, *n'cest pas?*

Getting to St-Tropez

It ain't easy to get to St-Tropez—and therein lies its fame. For a place to be a genuine haven for the rich and famous, it has to be inaccessible to mere mortals and easy to get to only for those with the ways and means to be the right kind of people. The best way to get to St-Tropez is by yacht—if not your own yacht, then someone else's yacht. Or any of the small but luxurious cruise ships that come to port here.

You can also drive, which is perfect if it's not summer. St-Tropez is only about 1½ hours from the Nice airport. But in summer, that same drive can take 4 hours. You can opt to take a helicopter from the airport or between towns; there is service between Cannes and St-Tropez. If you don't mind regional airports, you can fly right into Toulon.

There is summer ferry service among Nice, Cannes, and St-Tropez, but it's not a reliable form of transportation because it runs only if the sea is calm. Also, the times of the service are meant for day-trippers, not commuters, so you might not find this very useful. There is similar shuttle service by boat *(navette)* between St-Raphaël and Nice, for those using the Nice airport. In season, there is also a maritime transfer from St-Raphaël to

St-Tropez that usually begins in April; it's called the *bateau-taxi* and it leaves from the port. Call ✆ **04-94-95-17-46** for info.

For more direct airport service, you can take a bus, called Aviabus, from the Nice airport to St-Raphaël; you catch it right in front of the airport, easy as *gâteau*.

Hang onto your chapeau, because there is no train track along the Riviera that connects to St-Tropez. This is the meaning of exclusive. The train swerves in St-Raphaël, which isn't enormously far away, but it's not within walking distance. In summer, when the traffic makes the road as slow-moving as cold honey, you'll lose your mind trying to connect on the bus. The bus station is next door to the train station, and if you have a small tote bag, you can easily connect. If you have luggage, however, it could be problematic—made worse by the fact that frequently the connection time between bus and train is a mere 5 minutes. Oh yes, another thing about the train: Schedules change with the seasons.

Ask your hotel if it has a driver and a hotel van that can be hired to get you to the airport or wherever you need to go.

Traffic Warning

I understand that you weren't born yesterday, you are sophisticated, and of course you're expecting traffic. When I go out of my way to talk about traffic, I want to stress that traffic can be so bad that you won't have fun—that, quite simply, you can't get where you are going.

My last visit to St-Tropez was in the month of May—not even the height of the season. The 32km (20-mile) drive to the train station in St-Raphaël took over 2 hours, and we could not get a parking space in any lot (forget the street) in St-Trop on Tuesday—market day.

The traffic is so bad that road rage would be totally understandable. Reconsider bringing a car anywhere near town. Stay at a hotel in town—or stay at a resort and don't leave.

Getting Around St-Tropez

Ha. Good luck!

Sleeping in St-Tropez

Hotel Byblos

Av. Paul Signac, St-Tropez.

Right in the heart of town, the Hôtel Byblos takes up a city block in a sprawl of up-and-down and layers and levels—with a swimming pool at the core. There are several shops here, as well as a nightclub that is the most chic place to boogie in town. There's no cover, but drinks are very *cher.*

Room rates begin at 305€ ($350). For U.S. reservations, call Leading Hotels of the World at ✆ **800/223-6800.** Local phone ✆ 04-94-56-68-00. Fax 04-94-97-40-52. www.byblos.com.

Villa Marie

Chemin Val de Rian, Ramatuelle.

Ramatuelle is not in St-Tropez—it's the next town over. Nor is this hotel in downtown Ramatuelle, but out on a plain, not too far from the beach, pushed into a wall of pine trees and lavender.

As you walk in from the car park to the multi-level villa set around a patio and pool, you can actually smell the lavender. One of the Compagnie des Hôtels de Montagne family of hotels, this one is as plush and luxe as the others, with a full spa and dining program so that you truly can make the real world go away. The Fermes de Marie line of beauty products is provided in the bathrooms and sold in the spa. This is the kind of destination you pick when you want to plunk yourself down and escape.

The hotel is open only from April to November. Rates begin at 200€ ($230). ✆ **04-94-97-40-22.** www.c-h-m.com.

Eating in St-Tropez

One of the best-known shops in town is a bakery, **Patissier Senequier** (quai Jean Jaurès), which is behind a cafe of the same name. This is the most famous cafe in town for hanging out, seeing, and being seen. Around the corner is **Carmen et Dominique, Epicurie du Marché** (7 place aux Herbes), where you can buy fresh local cheeses and other goodies.

The surrounding hills are dotted with wineries where you can pop in for free tastings. I've always had doubts about how many of these places you can take (and still be sober enough to drive), and whether the quality of the local wine is worth the time and trouble.

For a sit-down-and-be-part-of-the-scene lunch, no place else will do save **Spoon Byblos,** at the Hôtel Byblos, avenue du Maréchal Foch (✆ **04-94-56-68-20**).

Shopping in St-Tropez

Let's face it: You don't come to St-Tropez just to shop. And it's not a place people go to be seen *in* their clothes—the converse is true. But while you're here, you might as well browse. You'll do your big-name, big-time shopping in Cannes, or even Aix. St-Tropez is for funky little shops, for boutiques filled with specialty resort wares, and for home-style Méditerranée.

Don't get me wrong, there is a very good, big perfumery in town (**Parfumerie Berton,** 19 quai Suffren) and there are a handful of designer shops; but that's not really the shopping action in St-Tropez. Sure, there's everything from **Hermès** to **Sonia Rykiel,** with **Soulieado** as well. But the fun is not in the nationally known brands.

St-Tropez is very much about the beach—especially two famous beaches, **Pampelonne** and **Tahiti.** It's common practice to have your own beach for your crowd, and to go only to that beach. You also eat at your own cafe or club there. After you order lunch, you pop up and shop at the beach shacks, which sell outrageous bathing suits and wraps and other beachy things. Vendors also come directly to you, carrying their wares.

Shopping Hours

Stores usually open around 10am and close at 12:30pm for lunch. They reopen at 2:30pm or later, depending on the type of store and the season. They stay open until 7pm out of season and 9pm in season. Real-people stores tend to open at 9am; pharmacies are open during lunch. Most stores close for the midday break, although a few tourist traps (TTs) stay open nonstop.

The season is July and August; some of the stores close when the season is over. Of those that close, about half will not return the next year. There will be end-of-season sales in September, but the big sales are actually in November.

Saturday and Sunday are both big days for retail; this is one of the few towns in the Riviera where the stores are wide open on Sunday. *Bon dimanche.*

Shopping Neighborhoods

THE PORT Yes, the port is where the boats are and isn't actually the best of shopping neighborhoods. It's more a shipping neighborhood. But, as in most port towns, the main street facing the water is the high street. In St-Tropez, the name of this street is quai Suffren. It not only hosts the big perfume shop Parfumerie Berton, but also has a ton of artists' stands and stalls on the water side. There are also quite a few TTs selling T-shirts, sweats, sunglasses, and hats.

OLD TOWN If your back is to the quai Suffren and you are facing the port, the right-hand side of the port U is called quai Jean Jaurès. It is strung with famous cafes. Behind those cafes and to your right is the Old Town, identified by two landmark towers, Tour du Portalet and Tour Vielle.

Be sure to check out the tiny little arcade that is the fish market. Even though it smells, it's covered with tiles and fishy country charm. The little street leading away from the Old Town is rue de la Ponche, which is where all the fancy shops are found.

LA CITADELLE Two of the good shopping streets in town are at odd angles and aren't where you'd expect shopping

streets to be, so watch for them. If the Old Town and the water are to your back, then the rue de la Citadelle is to your left and curves a bit, and then it straightens out.

GAMBETTA: MAIN STREET The main shopping street in terms of regular retail is rue Gambetta, which leads away from the Old Town and out yonder toward the Hôtel Byblos. Rue Gambetta is sort of a cross between a real-people street and a tourist street. There are a number of multiples here, as well as a small grocery store, a toy store, and an ice-cream shop in the area closest to the port. As Gambetta moves out of town, it becomes avenue Maréchal Foch. As Gambetta moves into Old Town, its name changes to rue des Commerçants. You can also cut through some of the medieval maze by using Passage Gambetta, a mall, as your tunnel; shop until you come out the other side.

ALLARD: PORT & CENTER If you stayed on Gambetta thinking it was the only main shopping street in town, you goofed. Rue Allard, which veers off from behind the quai Suffren and to one side as it leads away from town, has its own share of high-rent retail. In fact, this is really the town's high street.

There's lots to see and buy here, much of it local, with only a few big-name French multiples. You'll also find ice-cream cones and chocolates and even a very good art-supply store. The rue Allard becomes the rue Leclerc as you head out of town toward St-Raphaël.

LOUIS BLANC: EDGE OF TOWN Farther from the madding crowd and therefore more used by locals, this street is packed with home furnishings and design studios. Don't miss **Fred Prysquel** (no. 34–36) for the rustic country look of your dreams; **Pierre Basset** (no. 11) for tiles; and **La Maison Marine** (no. 2) for tabletop designs.

CLEMENCEAU: CUTE & CENTER This street is truly the heart of the cute retail in the center of town. It's sort of halfway between Gambetta and Allard—Gambetta runs parallel and Allard curves around to become almost parallel.

Photo ops galore. **Rodini** (no. 16) is one of the most famous makers of sandals in the local style and is considered an icon. The other big name for *tropézienne* sandals is **K. Jacques** (no. 13). Failure to wear sandals from one of these two places immediately places you in jeopardy of being discovered as an American, and a tourist at that. Failure to know what a *tropézienne* is could also be detrimental to your social standing, so here goes: It's a thong-style sandal with a wide, bird-wing strap that goes across the toes, anchored by the tiny leather bit that fits between the big toe and the second toe.

RUE SIBILLE: SIDE & CENTER This is a little bit of a side street that's right off the place des Lices and runs all the way to the waterfront. It's one of the more chic addresses for locals in the know. **Versace** is located nearby. **Claire L'Insolite** sells a mélange of big-name Italian designers, including Max Mara and Genny.

Big Names

Following are some of the big-name designer boutiques and chains in St-Tropez.

Agatha
56 rue Allard.

Alain Manoukian
Rue Georges Clemenceau.
Rue Allard.

Blanc Bleu
1–3 rue Allard.

Cerutti 1881
Rue de la Ponche.

Diego Della Valle
Passage du Port.

Dior
1 rue Gambetta.

EMILIO PUCCI
28 place de la Garonne.

FAÇONNABLE
Place de la Garonne.

HERMES
Place Georges Grammont.

LACOSTE
42 rue Allard.

LA PERLA
20 rue Allard.

LONGCHAMP
19 rue Allard.

MANRICO
Place des Lices.

SONIA RYKIEL
Place des Lices.

SOULEIADO
Rue Allard.

FINDS

BLVD. DES RUES
Rue de la Ponche.

One of the most unusual shops I've found in France, this tiny boutique sells items made from street signs and can also make up your name into a French-style street sign. Prices begin around 26€ ($30); a must-do.

FABIENNE VILLACRECES
15 bd. Louis Blanc.

Head here for fashion and home style, all incredibly chic and worthy of magazine layouts.

Kiwi
34 rue Allard.

This boutique sells resort wear and clothes that are simply perfect for the Riviera without being glitzy, gold lamé, covered in rhinestones, or tacky.

K. Jacques
16 rue Seillon.

One of the most famous makers of *tropéziennes* has a new decor and an old rep for the local look in sandals.

Le Byblos
Hôtel Byblos, av. Paul Signac.

This is one of the best hotel logo shops I've ever encountered. It has classy merchandise you would want to have that does not seem cheapened by the hotel logo. The little terry-cloth travel pouches are fabulous.

Pharmacie Mouton
9 rue Allard.

Yes, of course it's a regular pharmacy, but it also has its own house line of products, which is unusual. I buy the house brand of bubble bath in assorted aromatherapy and natural scents; I like lavender, vanilla, and the woodsy pine scent. It's one of the best lavenders I've ever bathed in. Because the plastic bottle is imprinted with the name and address of the pharmacy, I consider this a fabulously seductive gift-cum-status symbol for around 8.70€ ($10).

Markets & Fairs

If you want a real French market, you'd better get out of town. The St-Tropez market is a marvelous affair, almost theatrical in character, but very showbiz.

This is sort of a hippie, dippy market; it does not feel like France to me, but it's busy and energetic and filled with a wide

selection of wares—there's even *brocante* in the rear, although there are no bargains, believe me. The market is not one of those things merely set up to fleece tourists. It's a genuine market, with everything from local products, fabrics, and spices to foodstuff and baskets. There are two market days in St-Tropez: Tuesday and Saturday. Market is better in the summer, but it's also more crowded with tourists then.

Many of the vendors seen in St-Tropez rotate from town to town, and, of course, locals know them and their merchandise. Without the local crowd, the market would be totally bad Disney. As it is, it's small-time, but if you keep expectations low, you'll find it charming.

Unfortunately, some of the sellers who show on Saturday don't come back on Tuesday. *Quel dommage.* My fabric vendor sells in Lorgues on Tuesday and in St-Tropez on Saturday. This is the guy I've been buying Provençal prints from for many years.

On Wednesday, you want Cogolin; Thursday, it's Les Arcs; Friday, Cuers; and Sunday, Le Muy.

Brocante is sold in the place des Lices market in St-Tropez, as well as in all the other markets. For information on specific events or *brocante* fairs, you can contact **L'Union des Brocanteurs du Var** (✆ **04-94-59-56-13**). There is usually a printed schedule available for each season.

On summer Sundays, there's a farmer's market in the parking lot of **Petit Village** (La Foux, Gassin; ✆ **04-94-56-32-04**).

Out of Town

The town of **Gassin** is so close to St-Tropez that it's almost a suburb. Some people go just to look at the view. I go for the jam shop. Honest.

I don't want to ruin **Maison des Confitures** (route de Bourrian, Gassin) for you by offering too much hype, but I can't think of a more perfect French experience in all of France than to spend a half-hour in its delightful stone cottage shop. It carries more than 250 varieties, from the regular to the unusual. (The labels are in French, so you may need a dictionary.) There are some

unique flavor combinations that will leave you drooling—I couldn't resist the chocolate-and-cinnamon jam. You can buy gift baskets, low-sugar selections, and even some antiques. No credit cards, folks.

Thierry Derbez (route D98) is a farm-stand-cum-garden-cum-nursery-cum-real-people-gourmet, where you can load up with goodies that are good enough to please serious foodies.

Ramatuelle is a little medieval walled city not far from St-Tropez (just past Johnny Hallyday's house) where everything appears to be perfect. There's not really any serious shopping here, but you will see the usual tourist places that sell pottery and printed fabrics.

FAYENCE

If you think you've heard of Fayence, you're probably thinking of the term *faience,* which is a type of hand-painted pottery. This Fayence is a town some 20km (12 miles) from Cannes. It's close to the Riviera, but is really considered part of Provence—so read about it, and its new Four Seasons Resort Terre Blanche, in chapter 7.

CANNES

Yes, there are parts of Cannes that are glitzy or even silly, but there's so much going on and so many types of things happening that it's the heartbeat of the Riviera to me. I particularly like Cannes out of season and hope you'll plan a winter trip here, carefully avoiding holidays and conventions . . . and other tourists.

Cannes is the perfect hub not only for enjoying the local scene, but also for getting out and about and up the hills and over to Monte Carlo and off to Provence. But, wonderfully, Cannes is also a real city and a walking town, so you don't need a car. If you stay in a centrally located hotel, you can dash

in and out without ever having to worry about revving up the car or tipping the bellboy.

Cannes is still the best shopping town on the Riviera. Every store and brand is here, from **Zara,** the Spanish ready-to-wear firm, to **L'Occitane,** the Provençal soap and suds maker, to **Sephora,** the perfume store, and even **FNAC,** for CDs. Shopping is hot, hot, hot in a town that has known how to simmer ever since it recovered from World War II.

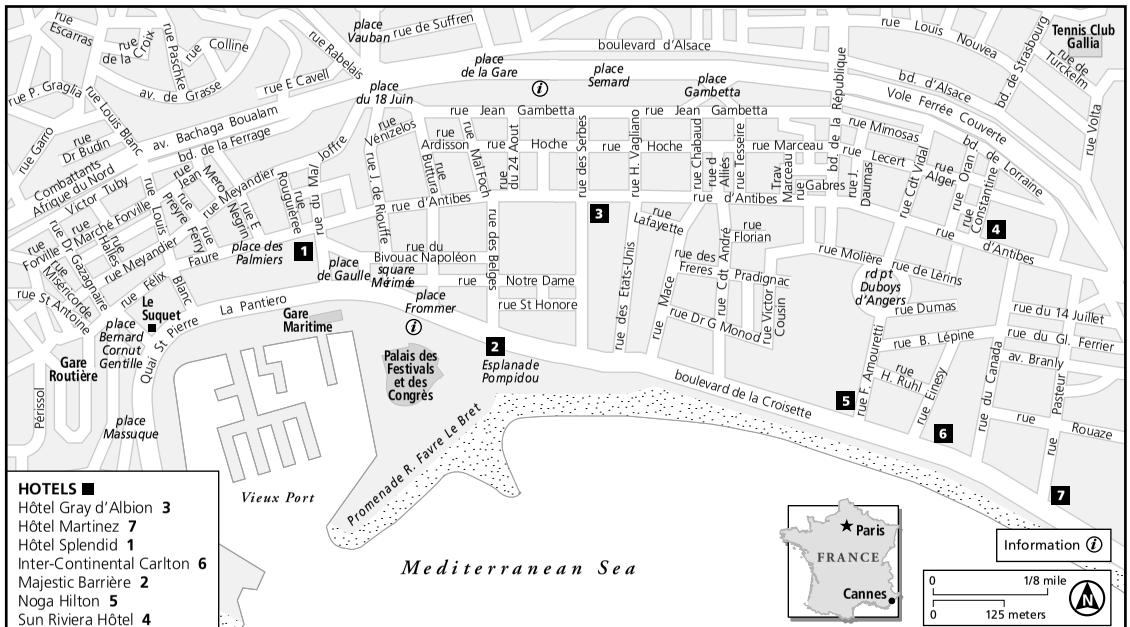
Cannes isn't funky like St-Tropez, or small-town like Eze, or tourist-trappy like Vallauris. The real Cannes has several personalities because it's actually a very big city that spreads and sprawls, and there are real people who live here. What you come to Cannes for, aside from the very famous conventions and the film festival, are the sun, the sand, and the shopping. Believe it or not, Cannes has added on a shopping festival, which the city hopes will become as famous as its film festival.

Getting to Cannes

BY PLANE The easiest way to get to Cannes is to fly into the Nice–Côte d'Azur International Airport. From there, you can now get a helicopter transfer to Cannes. Or you can take a bus, which costs about 17€ ($20) one-way; it departs from the front of the Nice airport every 20 to 30 minutes and takes you to downtown Cannes.

If you take a taxi from the airport, note that prices from Nice to Cannes are fixed; they don't go by the meter, so ask and try to negotiate. There is also a surcharge for each piece of baggage. Be prepared to pay as much as 100€ ($115) from Nice to Cannes. I do not tip on such rigged prices. A taxi from Cannes to the Nice airport is less expensive, as the local politics are different (don't ask).

Your hotel will gladly arrange a car-and-driver pickup at the airport for you (about 150€/$173); better yet, get my friend Piero—or his wife, Martine—at **E.T.S.** (✆ **04-92-98-06-29;** PBruni@compuserve.com). Transfers from the Nice airport to Cannes cost 80€ ($92) for one to four people in a sedan, 120€ ($138) for five to eight people in a van.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place de la Gare
place Semard
place Gambetta
place du 18 Juin
place Massuque
place Bernard Cornut Gentille
place des Palmiers
place de Gaulle
place Frommer
boulevard d'Alsace
boulevard de la Croisette
Promenade R. Favre Le Bret
rue d'Antibes
rue Jean Gambetta
rue Hoche
rue Marceau
rue Lafayette
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Cannes

If you plan on doing any driving around the area, pick up your rental car at the Nice airport. The airport is right on the highway; simply take the A8 and get off at the Cannes/Mougins exit. This is by far the best plan, and you will feel like a genius for having saved the round-trip taxi fare.

BY BOAT Numerous yachts, sailing vessels, and even the big luxury cruise ships call at the port of Cannes. The bay is too shallow for really large ships to come to the pier, so they send passengers to shore via tender, which land right at the Maritime Center next to the Palais des Festivals on La Croisette. The cruise lines that have shallow drafts can come right up to the dock. In many port towns, the pier is in a weird place, but in Cannes, it's right where you want it to be: in the heart of everything and directly across the street from the city's Saturday flea market. Who could ask for anything more?

The Lay of the Land

To get around town, you need to know only these few things:

- The upper city is mostly for real people, and fills in the tiers from the pay road to the sea. You will more than likely just drive through it—or never see it.
- The old city is located around yet another hill, Le Suquet, which rises alongside the old harbor (Le Vieux Port, or Old Port). Wear walking shoes.
- The new money is on La Croisette. By new, I mean post-1834, which is when Cannes suddenly became fashionable due to a cholera epidemic in Nice. Ever since then, the beach area and promenade in Cannes (bd. de la Croisette) have been the in places to be seen in your tight bustle, tight hoop skirt, tight cloche, or tight little Pucci.
- The real-people shopping street is the rue d'Antibes, a block behind La Croisette and running parallel to it.
- The train station is in the heart of town, so if you don't drive, you can easily walk to and from the station from just about any hotel or store.

Getting Around Cannes

Walk. Even if you have a car, don't drive in town if you can help it. Traffic is not as bad as in St-Tropez, but finding a parking space can take longer than the errand you want to run.

Sleeping in Cannes

The hotel situation in Cannes is tricky; here are a few general tips for the smart consumer:

- Because Cannes has imported sand at its beaches and, therefore, has the best beaches in the area, the demand to stay in Cannes and use it as a hub city for the Riviera is high. Consequently, rooms in this town should be booked as far in advance as possible. Although you can get lucky at the last minute, this is not a last-minute kind of town.
- Cannes is not only a beach town but also a convention town—more shows than you can imagine play at the major convention facilities at the Palais des Festivals and the Palais de Croisette. If there's a convention in town, forget about a discount, and possibly forget about a room altogether.
- Forget about getting a room in a palace hotel during the Cannes Film Festival.
- "Festival" is a season in Cannes and no longer refers to simply the famous (or is that infamous?) film festival in May. Festival is the highest rate on the books at palace hotels and is charged anytime a huge convention is in town and rooms are in short supply.
- August is the next most expensive month; it has deals, as most of the other times of the year do, except at festival.
- Out-of-season package deals can be so low that you won't believe you're booking Cannes. These packages provide room, breakfast, and usually other perks as well.
- Hotels that are very similar to one another can have amazingly different prices. Trickier still, their promotional deals might sound similar, but the product each is offering at that price may not be the same.

- The same hotel room at the same time of year may be marketed differently to different nationalities or in different parts of the world. Also note that some promotions require a minimum stay.
- Oceanview rooms always cost more than other rooms and are rarely included in promotional prices.
- Breakfast may be included with your room rate, but find out if it's a continental breakfast or a full breakfast—this makes a big difference, unless you happen to eat like a French bird. Breakfast for two people can easily cost 43€ ($50), so look for hotels in which a full American breakfast or a breakfast buffet is included.
- While you're checking if breakfast is included, find out what else is included. Often a hotel will have several promotions going on at the same time. You'll discover that the hotel with more things included comes out to be a better value.
- If you're choosing a hotel for its beach club, understand that you usually pay 25€ ($29) per person per day for a chaise longue. However, most of the palace hotels have specific summer promotions that include a chaise longue with the room. Ask! Few will volunteer to point out the inconsistencies of the various plans available.
- Of course, your dog can stay in the hotel, too. That's possibly another 25€ ($29) per night, but he's family, *non?* Usually the car fee and the dog fee are equal. Dogs do cost more than children; kids up to the age of 12 or 16 (it depends on the hotel) are usually free if they stay in your room, although there is a charge for an extra bed—and that can be very steep.

THE PALACE HOTELS

Cannes, like all other cities in France, has no five-star hotels, but it does have four four-star deluxe hotels (written *****D*) that are classified in the French manner as "palace hotels."

Hôtel Martinez
73 bd. de la Croisette.

As a member of both Concorde Hotels and Leading Hotels of the World, the Martinez is possibly the most glam of the palace hotels and yet offers a large number of spiffy promotions, including rates frozen in U.S. dollars (sometimes).

It's located at the far end of the shopping district, but when you get Annick Goutal amenities in the bathroom, it's worth the walk. You'll feel as though you're on a 1930s ocean liner, you'll sink into all the Art Deco, and you'll just melt from an overload of swanky. The hotel has just added a spa, an MGM suite, a Ze Beach venue on the sand, and various deals so that you can dine chez Christian Willer, the many-star chef. You can even eat in the kitchen, if you book way in advance.

Note: As much as I adore this hotel, I must confess that it's an apples-and-oranges kind of place: Because it is the largest hotel in town (more than 400 rooms) and because it was built in the late 1920s, it has a number of small and bad rooms—more than most of the other palace hotels. So although you can get a great promotional rate here, you might not get a great room.

Rates begin at about 174€ ($200) out of season with special promotions and go up from there; the summer price I usually pay is about 261€ ($300), which includes the chaise longue on the beach. For U.S. reservations, call ✆ **800/888-4747.** Local phone ✆ 04-92-98-73-00. www.hotel-martinez.com.

InterContinental Carlton Cannes
58 bd. de la Croisette.

The Carlton has been featured in numerous movies and even in a recent automobile ad. None of this fanfare comes cheaply, and the bargain promotional rate advertised in print may be hard to nail in reality. The Carlton does get included in InterContinental promotions, although there are few low-cost

rooms in season. Even if you don't stay here, I insist that you do lunch on the terrace of the Cafe, preferably during the film festival. There is no better definition of Cannes.

Promotional rates can deliver a room for about 225€ ($259), but the norm is, of course, much higher; during the season, it's more like 500€ ($575) per night. For reservations from the U.S., call ✆ **800/327-0200.** Local phone ✆ 04-93-68-91-68. Fax 04-93-06-40-25. www.cannes.intercontinental.com.

MAJESTIC BARRIÈRE
14 bd. de la Croisette.

Recently renovated and brought up to par with the other palace hotels, the Majestic is more of an insider's place. The chef, Bruno Oger, has stars, and a branch of the famous bistro Fouquet's has come to the lobby. The convention crowds consider this hotel a must-do, and the stores out front make the location ideal. You can dine around the pool, or sit half the day in the lobby bar and simply stare. Of the four palace hotels, this one is often the least expensive. What more could you want?

Rates vary with the season, but begin around 190€ ($219). In the U.S., call ✆ **800/223-6800.** Local phone ✆ 04-92-98-77-00. www.lucienbarriere.com.

NOGA HILTON CANNES
50 bd. de la Croisette.

Location is this hotel's best claim to fame. The property is built into the Palais de Croisette, so if you're going to a convention, you're in the right place. It also has its own small shopping mall. As for the hotel itself, it has a few choice secrets—such as a good chef; a fixed-price gourmet formula; menu service at the beach cafe rather than just buffet service; various promotions, including Hilton rates and local deals; and a house full of rooms that were created to be equal, so they are all the same size—there are no bad rooms.

There are 45 suites and some 200 rooms that have either ocean or city views. Prices are usually competitive with those at the Martinez, although you can sometimes latch onto a Hilton promotion for a room as low as 198€ ($228) per night.

As a special courtesy to *Born to Shop* readers, the hotel's general manager is pleased to offer a room upgrade, which will be granted based on availability. He cannot fax back a confirmed upgrade, but if he's got the space when you arrive, you've got a "suite" deal. From the U.S., send a fax directly to Richard Duvauchelle, General Manager, Noga Hilton Cannes, fax **33-4-92-99-70-15.**

For reservations from the U.S., call ✆ **800/HILTONS.** Local phone ✆ 04-92-99-70-00. www.hilton.com.

The Four-Stars

Hotel Gray d'Albion

38 rue des Serbes.

You can't get a better shopping hotel than a place located in the best mall in town, right in the core of the best shops. The Hôtel Gray d'Albion shares the same owners as the Majestic, but it is more modern and less expensive. Out-of-season rates begin at 145€ ($167). Local phone ✆ **04-92-99-79-79.** www.lucienbarriere.com.

Hotel Splendid

4–6 rue Félix-Faure.

This hotel is actually a three-star, but the location is truly splendid—and closer to McDonald's than any of the palace hotels. It's not fancy, but it has a lot of charm and a super setting in the heart of everything—basically across the street from the Palais des Festivals and 2 blocks from Le Suquet. It's almost on top of the Saturday flea market, and it's deep in the heart of shopping land. Some rooms have kitchenettes; some have sea views (more expensive). This place is a real gem for those who love funky charm.

There are only about 60 rooms, so book early. Rates begin at 103€ ($118) out of season. For U.S. reservations, call ✆ **800/462-7274.** Local phone ✆ 04-97-06-22-22. accueil@splendid-hotel-cannes.fr.

SUN RIVIERA HOTEL
138 rue d'Antibes.

This hotel is smack dab in the middle of the Cannes shopping district, a block from La Croisette—but it still has charm and even a small swimming pool. It's a member of Châteaux & Hôtels de France. It closes out of season, but just from the middle of November until New Year's. Rooms begin at 115€ ($132). To book from the U.S., call ✆ **800/553-5090.** Local phone ✆ 04-93-06-77-77. www.sun-riviera.com.

Eating in Cannes

If you're just out for a quick bite in Cannes, there are plenty of choices. Ice-cream stores are all over town, even in the high-rent districts. I am almost certain that it is against the law to walk the streets of Cannes without an ice-cream cone in hand; ice-cream vendors are everywhere, but certain ones are known for their exotic flavors made with local ingredients. Try **Curly,** right on La Croisette, between the Majestic and Noga Hilton.

The rue d'Antibes, Cannes's main real-people shopping and strolling street, is crammed with ice-cream parlors (even **Häagen-Dazs**), tearooms, and fast-food joints. Near the Maritime Center, at the Allées de Liberté, there's a **McDonald's** (called McDo in French slang), with **Planet Hollywood** a few doors away.

All the hotel beach clubs have restaurants on the beach, just down the stairs from La Croisette. If the weather is fine, dining alfresco can be part of the pleasure of Cannes—just check to see which restaurants have a la carte service, since some only serve a buffet at a flat price.

Inside the hotels, there are often bistros with fair prices and a chance to see how the other half lives, if you're not a regular.

La Croisette is also lined with streetside cafes that feature average food at high prices, but allow you to be part of the parade. **Felix,** between the Carlton and the Martinez, has just been renovated with a sleek new look; pizza and pasta run about 50€ ($58) per person.

Although the cafes are more of an evening ritual than a daytime and shopping-break thing, they are open for business and less crowded during off hours. **Caffe Roma,** across from the Palais des Festivals, is the hip in spot for the young, Lycra-clad Eurotrash crowd. My fave is **Le Farfalla,** also on La Croisette across from the Palais. From the street it looks very average, but once you're inside and into the scene, you can enjoy a hot, young crowd and these adorable waitresses with lighters on their uniform sleeves—yep, they flick their Bics for you. The scene, especially late at night, is truly outrageous. The food's okay, too, with enormous portions. It's just great fun and very much part of what Cannes is all about.

Cafe Carlton

Carlton Hotel, 58 bd. de la Croisette.

If you want to enjoy an affordable lunch or snack, let down your hair and set down your packages, be part of the "in" crowd, and feel the special Cannes magic, then head for this coffee shop–cum–breakfast room in the front of the Carlton. If weather permits, dine on the terrace. It's heaven.

Fouquet's

10 bd. de la Croisette.

Now for the French lesson: For some reason, you say the final *t.* Located in the Hôtel Majestic, Fouquet's has recently come to town and in short order become an "in" spot thanks to its famous name and great location.

LENOTRE
63 rue d'Antibes.

Lenôtre is one of the most famous (and chic) names in Paris in terms of chocolates and takeaway foods. The meals are light: salads, quiches, or a yummy tomato *tarte* with chevre. You can get breakfast, lunch, a snack, a pastry, chocolates, ice cream, or takeout here.

RELAIS MARTINEZ
Hôtel Martinez, 73 bd. de la Croisette.

From the name you can guess that this place is in the Hôtel Martinez. The rest of the good news: It's open 7 days a week, has a fixed-price menu at about 40€ ($46), and offers tastes of chef Christian Willer's recipes.

Shopping in Cannes

BEST BUYS

Are there any good buys in a resort town where the rich and famous hang? Yeah, as a matter of fact, there are. What follows is an overview of the good, the bad, and the ugly. Also note that if you come during the Shopping Festival, which is in January during the French national sale period, you get discounts and gifties as well as sale prices.

DESIGNER CLOTHES If you're seriously shopping for serious clothes and you are not headed for Paris, Cannes gives you a better selection of big names than any other city on the Riviera, including Nice and Marseille. Best buys on designer clothes are those items (on sale!) that still qualify for a *détaxe* refund. The savings are even more dramatic if you buy from a *dépôt-vente* (resale shop).

FOODSTUFFS This is a great town for buying gourmet foodstuffs. Olive oil is a fabulous souvenir. Buy yours in the **Marché Forville** or the tiny store **Cannolive.** However, you will have many other opportunities to buy olive oil, so just warm

up to the notion here or start tasting and learning. Meanwhile, try **Boutique des Landes,** right across from the market, which sells homemade *confiture* (jam), complete with the gold medal it won printed on the label.

Shopping Hours

Regular business hours in Cannes are from 9am to 7pm. Many stores open at 9am, although the majority of name boutiques open at 10am.

A large number of stores close for lunch from 12:30 to 2:30pm. Those that do not close for lunch often have the word *nonstop* posted, or the slogan *sans interruption.*

Most stores are closed on Monday mornings, but the glorious thing about Cannes is that Mondays are not dead. During the summer, some stores stay open on Monday mornings. During school vacations or holidays, almost everything is open on Mondays. And, of course, there's a *brocante* market at Forville on Mondays.

Most stores are closed on Sundays, although there is a small amount of Sunday-morning action. Cannes is not nearly as dead as many French towns: Marché Forville is wide open on Sundays, and about half of the shops on the food street, rue Meynadier, stay open on Sunday until noonish. By late afternoon, most of the stores on Le Suquet open and stay open until midnight.

Shopping Neighborhoods

The basic Cannes shopping neighborhoods all interconnect and can be walked, although if it's hot or you are wearing stiletto heels (isn't everyone in Cannes?), this will be more difficult.

LA CROISETTE The main drag along the waterfront is called boulevard de la Croisette, or simply La Croisette. The beach itself is actually below the promenade, so you must go down steps to get to the sand. All the major hotels and many of the major shops are lined up at attention facing the sea,

stretching from the Palais des Festivals to the Hôtel Martinez. The major hotels' lobbies usually have a few shops as well; Noga has a minimall attached to it.

GRAY D'ALBION Gray d'Albion is a large building, a mall, a shortcut through town to bring you from La Croisette to rue d'Antibes, and a local legend wrapped into one. Oh my, I forgot to say it's also a hotel.

There are in fact two buildings that make up the complex, so if you're shopping, note that you enter, exit, and enter and exit again, before you end up at rue d'Antibes. Once considered the best address in town if you couldn't get the Croisette, the mall houses many big-name shops, including **Hermès** and **La Perla.**

RUE D'ANTIBES Moving one street back from the sea, you've got the rue d'Antibes, which runs parallel to La Croisette. Although it isn't the low-rent district by any means, it has more real-people shops, more branches of famous French multiples (such as **Kookai, Pimkie,** and **Descamps**), and fewer big international icon names (such as **Lalique** and **Lancel**). Many of the stores have given themselves face-lifts; part of the street has become a pedestrian mall. This street has a neighborhood feel, it has life at night (La Croisette has too much life), and you'll enjoy strolling and just looking in windows. La Croisette is for looking at other people; rue d'Antibes is for shoppers. The central portion has just become a pedestrian thoroughfare.

MIDDLE ETATS-UNIS This is the name I have made up for the neighborhood of streets that connect La Croisette with the rue d'Antibes. The streets are in the center of town, in between the Palais des Festivals and the Majestic. These streets are only about 2 blocks long, and each is crammed with stores. Many of them are upscale; some even bear designer names.

The central street of this neighborhood is rue des Etats-Unis. Rue des Serbes and rue du Commandant André are also excellent side streets for browsing, prowling, and ruining your credit rating. Most of the stores in this cross-street grid are not

big names, although you will find **Sonia Rykiel, Chacok,** and others, as well as shops like **Oliviers & Co.**

ROND POINT DU BOYS-D'ANGERS Directly behind the Noga Hilton, about a block away, I direct your attention to a tiny, isolated group of shops that you would have never found unless you were lost or someone had given you directions to one of the stores.

FOOD TOWN There is no part of Cannes that is actually called Food Town, yet what I call Food Town is located behind the Old Port and consists of several parts: Marché Forville (coral stucco; you can't miss it); the rue Félix-Faure, where the market is located; the rue Meynadier, which juts off at an angle from the Félix-Faure; and Allées de la Liberté, where the flower market is held most days. All these elements make for a neighborhood that is more than just a string of gourmet and real-people food stores and candy shops.

The rue Meynadier is filled with gourmet food shops. More important, if your idea of France is not all topless beaches and Chanel sunglasses, you will find what you are looking for in these back streets and byways. That it could also be chocolate is an added plus.

Please do not think that Food Town sells only food. The rue Meynadier is one of the main shopping streets in town, and it's filled with TTs and other stores that service both tourists and real people. Prices are lower here than at Versace.

LE SUQUET The oldest part of town and the part that most looks like a charming village, Le Suquet is also the place to eat, if we're talking fun or funky, not multiple Michelin stars. There are also some stores around here, but they tend to be either TTs or antiques shops. Many shops sell the inexpensive Provençal fabrics, so they look cute.

Mostly this is an eating street, with dozens of cafes in a row. You simply march up the hill and decide which one you like. I've tried a variety of them and have no favorites. They do tend to be touristy. To get here, walk along rue d'Antibes

Cannes Prestige

A majority of the high-end shops in Cannes belong to an association called *Cannes Prestige,* which you can identify by its logo: a *C* with a feather. Cannes Prestige publishes a guide of its member shops, which agree to certain bylaws in order to offer the best service possible. Among the amenities they offer is at least one member of the sales staff who speaks English. Look for the logo when you shop.

in the downtown area until you pass the Old Port. Look for a tiny pedestrian street called rue St-Antoine, which is mobbed and lined with cafes. It has recently been repaved with smooth cobblestones, but it's not the place for high heels. This is an evening parade, so forget it as a regular shopping district. The stores stay open late, sometimes until midnight in the summer.

Markets & Fairs

Cannes has plenty of market action just about every day of the week. Although the Marché Forville is not quite as spectacular as the fruit-and-flower market in Nice, it's not at all bad, and you can spend many happy hours there. In fact, you can spend many happy months there. The fruit-and-flower market is open every day except Monday. (Sun is a great day to come.) This is a morning event, so people tend to pack up by 1 to 2pm. On Monday, the Marché Forville sells *brocante.*

There is a small daily market at place Gambetta, which is directly behind the Noga Hilton. It isn't much of a market, but it is open on Monday—and I find it hilarious. It sells dry goods (cheap shoes, cheap clothes, fake sunglasses), as well as fruits and veggies, and has a very small-town, neighborhoody feel to it. I wouldn't go out of my way to get there, but it does have a quiet charm and a funky flair.

On Saturday, there is a flea market with antiques at les Allées de la Liberté, across from the Old Port, where La Croisette

becomes La Pantiero. It's right next to McDonald's, so if you need directions, ask for McDo. During the week, a few vendors sell flowers; some guidebooks go so far as to call this a flower market or a sight worth seeing. Vendors also sell flowers in Forville, which is good enough for me, or you can wait for Nice.

Cannes Shopping Festival

Inspired by the success of the shopping festival in Dubai and by its own 50-plus years as creator of festivals, the city of Cannes last year began its own Shopping Festival, held for 3 weeks in January each year.

The timing of the festival was planned in coordination with the national sale dates, and involves various discounts both on hotel rooms and in stores. Stores stay open on Sunday; fashion shows are staged; and rooms in palace hotels go for 115€ ($132) per person. (Four-star rates are 55€/$63 per person.)

For more information on dates and promotions go to www.cannes.com.

Cannes Resources A–Z

Antiques & Auctions

You can't in your right mind consider Cannes as a source for serious antiques, but if you like junk and flea markets and poking around, you'll be surprised not only by how much this town has to offer, but also by the fact that prices are beyond fair—they can be among the best in France. I do not even step foot inside any of the formal antiques shops in Cannes; forgive me, but I'm not interested in formal antiques, and I go by the old rule of thumb that antiques shops in resort cities are always expensive.

Nonetheless, for those who like serious antiques and big-time dealers, there's a biannual show called **Salon des Antiquaires à Cannes,** held every winter and every summer for 2 weeks in the Palais des Festivals. For specific dates, write the **Association des Antiquaires de Cannes** (Pascal Moufflet, 13 rue d'Oran, 06400 Cannes; ✆ **04-93-38-13-64;** fax 04-93-68-99-79).

Note that the hours of formal antiques shows all over France, not just here, are rather unusual by American standards. Shows may not open until 11am or noon, and they stay open until 9pm or so. Sometimes shows are held only in the afternoon, beginning at 3 or 4pm and lasting until 10pm. Perhaps this is so Madame can bring her husband and his checkbook.

If the kind of antiques you prefer are what the French call *brocante,* Cannes is a great place to shop. On Monday morning, beginning at 8am, the **Marché Forville** is filled with dealers—it's fun and funky and quite affordable. Monday is also the big day for *brocante* in Nice—don't miss it if at all possible—so you can start in one town and finish up in the other. Doing the two markets together in one day will make your trip and fill your home.

On Saturday, the Allées de la Liberté (near McDonald's) is filled with dealers; this is also great fun, although it's much more upscale in feel than the Monday show. The dealers are not the same, so don't feel like you've seen it and done it. Note also that this location is directly across from the ship terminal (Maritime Center), so if you're on a cruise ship and you come to port on a Saturday, voilà—*les marché aux puces.*

If you have a car, you can hit *brocante* markets in nearby villages on just about every day of the week. On Thursday, it's *brocante* day at the *marché paysan* in nearby Mandelieu. This is a very low-end affair on blankets in a parking lot, but if you have transportation, you might enjoy it; prices are quite low and this is the real thing, sans tourists.

On Saturday and Tuesday, Antibes has a tiny but yummy little flea market in the street, right off the old port. There are also dealers on the roads that reach outside of Cannes and into the nearby villages—head off toward Grasse and Mougins or toward Antibes and just find 'em.

As for real antiques shops in Cannes, well, along the boulevard de la République, a real-people street in downtown Cannes, there are a few dealers not too far from one another.

These are serious dealers, not funky junk stores. Start with **Lucienne Lai** (99 bd. de la République).

Those interested in antiques should also know that Nice has a big antiques community and that Monaco has some fancy shops and a very big-time show. There are also auctions in the winter season. For information on specific auctions or events, check the local newspaper.

Big Names

For years, there's been a trend in this town toward a handful of fancy-schmancy boutiques that are named after their owners and that carry several designer lines. Sometimes these stores have a theme—only Italian designers, for example. I have listed this type of shop under "Boutiques," below. More and more designers are opening freestanding shops in Cannes, so this type of store may eventually die out or move farther away from the tourist real estate and into the realm of local shopping. What follows is a list of freestanding, big-name designer stores:

Alma
67 La Croisette.

Bulgari
14 La Croisette.

Cartier
57 La Croisette.

Celine
24 La Croisette.

Cerruti 1881
15 rue des Serbes (men).
65 rue d'Antibes (women).

Chanel
5 La Croisette.

CHARLES JOURDAN
47 rue d'Antibes.

CHRISTIAN DIOR
38 La Croisette.

CHRISTOFLE
9 rue d'Antibes.

DUNHILL
14 La Croisette.

EMPORIO ARMANI
52 La Croisette.

ESCADA
15 rue des Serbes.

FERRAGAMO
34 La Croisette.

FRED
21 La Croisette.

GERARD DAREL
119 rue d'Antibes.

GIANFRANCO FERRE
67 La Croisette.

GIANNI VERSACE
9 rue St-Honoré.

GUCCI
17 La Croisette.

HERMES
17 La Croisette.

JEAN LOUIS SCHERRER
17 La Croisette.

Joseph
116 rue d'Antibes.

Kenzo
96 rue d'Antibes.

Lalique
87 rue d'Antibes.

Lancel
34 rue d'Antibes.

La Perla
Gray d'Albion, 17 La Croisette.

Laurel
123–125 rue d'Antibes.

Louis Vuitton
44 La Croisette.

Max Mara
79 rue d'Antibes.

Pierre Cardin
9 La Croisette.

Sonia Rykiel
15 rue des États-Unis.

Ungaro
55 La Croisette.

Van Cleef & Arpels
61 La Croisette.

Ventilo
121 rue d'Antibes.

Yves Saint Laurent/Rive Gauche
44 La Croisette.

BOUTIQUES

ALEXANDRA
Rond Point du Boys-d'Angers.

This is the leading light in the biggest French and Italian names, the most famous of the specialty boutiques, and the last word in chic. I don't need to tell you that we're into expensive garments and high style. But of course, darling. Now you're a member of the club. We must have lunch.

REUSSNER
4 rue Commandant André.

Reussner is another of those small, special shops for those in the know. This one has the cutting edge: Alexander McQueen, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, and so on. Top drawer.

VIA VENETO
91 rue d'Antibes.

The good news is that this is a string of three fabulous shops that have all the big, hip Italian designers and some of the French ones, too. If you love fashion, you will adore these boutiques, where the service-oriented staff is used to a very with-it customer. The bad news is that the Versace jeans I thought I couldn't live without cost 152€ ($175). Still, much fun just to touch everything and dream about the look. Certainly Cannes is the place to wear it.

CHILDREN'S CLOTHES

For affordable kids' clothing, I shop at **Monoprix.** For rich grandmas or those who never look at price tags, a stroll through both parts of the mall at Gray d'Albion will knock your socks off—there are numerous fancy-schmancy boutiques here for kiddie style, including shoe shops and designer clothing shops.

Catimini
Gray d'Albion.

Catimini is an absolutely adorable, reasonably priced shop for designer kids' wear.

Dominique
7 Rond Point du Boys-d'Angers.

This adorable shop is filled with old-fashioned smocking for infants and young girls along with traditional baby items. It's a block behind the Noga Hilton.

Floriane
60 rue d'Antibes.

Floriane sells fun, colorful, traditional clothes, with enough of an updated look to not be out of style—very upscale French middle class. It's at the back end of the Gray d'Albion mall.

Crafts

At the far end of Allées des Liberté, there are a few crafts vendors who sell their wares from tables; Saturday is the biggest day.

Department Stores

Galeries Lafayette
6 rue du Maréchal Foch.

If you're thinking about the Galeries Lafayette in Paris or even the store in Nice, try to calm down now. This particular branch is nice but not as big as the Nice or Marseille stores, nor is it particularly complete or satisfying.

Monoprix
9 rue du Maréchal Foch.

Monoprix isn't really a department store; it's what an American would call a dime store. It's one of my favorite places to

shop. There's a grocery store upstairs, which makes a fine browse and a good place to buy mustard and various foodstuffs for gifts. It's also the best place for postcards.

Discount, Degriffe & Depot-Vente

Contrepartie
Rond Point du Boys (at rue de Lérins).

This is a *dépôt-vente* that sells gently worn clothes. We're talking Chanel suits for 609€ ($700)—which is, by the way, almost exactly the same price you will pay for used Chanel in New York. This small, packed store is directly behind the Noga Hilton. It has shoes and handbags as well; the best stuff is in the windows and up front. There is a separate men's store.

Film Festival Souvenirs

If you happen to be in town during the film festival, don't think you have to be invited to walk the red carpet in order to play. Although there are three official screenings a day, the 7:30pm screening is the biggie, and everyone comes all dolled up beginning around 6:30pm.

Freelance photographers stand near the red carpet to take photos, which will be on sale the next day. You need not have tickets or passes to the festival in order to get your photo taken. There is sort of a system to it: Some photographers pop out in front of you, snap a few shots, and hand you a card. Others don't say a word. You can also ask a shooter to take your photo and ask for his card. The next day after noon, you go to the address printed on the card or go to the boards under the tents alongside the Palais, where you look for your photo. The proofs are on the boards—you mark the number, pay, and wait for the print. Prices vary from around 8.70€ to 35€ ($10–$40); the time it takes for the print can be from 10 minutes to 4 hours. In my case, the photos from one of the sources had to be mailed to me—I didn't think they'd ship to the United States, so I left a local contact, my hotel concierge. The hotel forwarded the photos to me.

For high-class souvenirs as well as other items, there's a chain of stores called **Davis,** with one shop right on La Croisette across from the Palais and one shop at the back end of the mall Gray d'Albion.

Souvenirs are also sold in the streets (I found a great tote bag for less than 13€/$15), as well as in official booths under tents at the Palais. The souvenirs with the proper date of the festival come out 2 weeks beforehand and then stay on the shelves for the year—so it could be the year 2005, but up until May 1, you'll see 2004 festival stuff for sale.

Aside from the director's chairs, my favorite souvenir is the T-shirt, which comes packaged in a tin reel can (another 13€/$15 or so). These kinds of things are sold up and down rue Meynadier.

Flowers

Melonie
80 rue d'Antibes.

Melonie sells (and ships!) Provençal-style dried arrangements of lavender, roses, grasses, and so on.

OWO
7 rue Lafontaine.

This tiny, incredibly chic shop sells cut flowers and does arrangements, and its dried concoctions are the best in town. It's located on a street off rue d'Antibes, not far from the Noga.

Food & Wine

There's no lack of fine food in Cannes. If you aren't into checking out specific addresses, then merely browse rue Meynadier, which is crammed with specialists and has a branch of the **Champion** grocery store. This isn't the best grocery I've been to, even in the area, but it's there and you're there, so why not?

Monoprix has a small supermarket upstairs; for gift items, this may be all you need. I buy coffee and mustard here. I also found my little wheelie red nylon market cart here. (I don't recommend the cheapie house brand; it's too short for a tall person. Splurge for a more expensive one with a longer extension handle.) You can get picnic items or just browse around enough to feel that you're French.

Remember that there's one fabulous fruit-and-veggie market (Marché Forville) and one small market (place Gambetta). Also note one of the tricks my friend Pierre, the executive chef at the Noga, taught me: The stands in the Marché Forville are ranked. The chefs buy wholesale from dealers who surround the market but are not under the market roof. If they want something special, they go to the area where the top vendors are located, which is in one specific far corner—the prices are higher here than at the other stands, but the quality is better. Almost all markets in all towns have a secret like this to them.

I don't really think you need a map of the *marché* (market), since it's square, but take a look around as you arrive so that you understand the layout. The market is held on the place called place du Marché (so simple, these French). Surrounding the market and facing it are more suppliers; these are mostly wholesalers. Vincent, the fruit broker that Pierre uses, is here. There's a dry-goods store across the way that sells everything, including a wide variety of market baskets, which may come in handy. (I keep mine at the Noga, waiting for me for each trip.) Any store with the address "place du Marché" is in the circle that surrounds the market square.

If you're standing under the arch at the market that says PORTE FORVILLE, your back is to Vincent, the wholesaler, and the covered market is to your left. In the near corner of the top right of the market is the niche where the best-quality goods are sold.

Most food shops open relatively early in the morning but close at 12:30pm; some close for lunch, while some close for the day. Those that reopen do so at 2 or 2:30pm. Many are open Sunday morning. Some close in November. Hours

during the summer season and school holidays—when tourists are in town—may be more liberal than usual.

Cave de Forville
3 Marché Forville.

This local wine shop also sells some hard liquor and much champagne. You'll have a ball here. You can pick up some gourmet foodstuffs for picnics, too.

Chez Bruno
50 rue d'Antibes.

Perhaps this store considers itself the rival of Maiffret (they are virtually across the street from each other), but I find it very different. There's something funky and friendly about Maiffret, whereas this store, with its very proper packages of just the right candies for gifts and entertaining, is formal and stiff. It's a local status symbol, though.

La Boutique des Landes
13 place du Marché Forville.

This is a small, sometimes dark, unassuming shop in the area around Marché Forville. It sells canned and packaged French foods, such as duck and mushrooms, but the specialty of the house is the gold-medal confiture, which comes in a variety of flavors. The shop is open on Sundays.

La Ferme Savoyarde
22 rue Meynadier.

The most famous cheese shop in Cannes is also one of the most famous in France and has been recognized with honors from the French government. It flies cheese to various luxury hotels around the world, supplies the local big-name chefs, and has been cited by many food writers as the place to worship the cow or the goat or the sheep. Three generations of the Ceneri family run the shop. You can spend weeks here. My favorite is the cheese rolled in raisins.

MAIFFRET
31 rue d'Antibes.

This is a branch of the famous Parisian candy maker. The specialty in the south of France is *fruits confits* (candied and dried fruits), but you can also find many chocolates, various hard candies, bonbons, and things for kiddies. Very high-status gift items. Maiffret also sells cakes and a variety of regional goodies—enough to make a true foodie go nuts. Forget the diet. Note that the store is very deep, so keep walking back to find more and more selections.

OLIVIERS & CO.
4 rue Macé.

This is a branch of the store that's famous for olives, olive oil, and other great stuff.

SCHIES CHOCOLATIER
125 rue d'Antibes.

This chocolatier is toward what I call the uptown end of rue d'Antibes. I went here during Carnaval one year to find that it was making wafer-thin chocolate masks! Divinely French.

HAIR SALONS

CARITA
21 rue Commandant André.

Carita is well established in Paris and rather new in Cannes. This is the place where you'll never go wrong. To book, call **✆ 04-92-99-22-00.**

JACQUES DESSANGE
Galerie Noga Hilton, 50 La Croisette.

I've been going here for years, partly because it is in the Noga Hilton. The employees don't speak too much English, but

style is universal. It costs about 43€ ($50) for a cut and a blow-dry. For an appointment, call ✆ **04-93-99-00-30.**

Jean Louis David
21 rue des États-Unis.

No appointment needed here. It's not too expensive and you won't get the world's best blow-dry, but it just might be good enough.

Home Style

Descamps
111 rue d'Antibes.

This store sells the famous brand of French bed linen, along with some home accessories, robes, and the like. It's all in a soft, very chic palette of colors—the Armani feel.

Mis En Demeure
Gray d'Albion, 17 La Croisette.

Walk through the first part of Gray d'Albion and then outside. Now head into the second part of Gray d'Albion (this will make perfect sense when you're actually standing there) and look to your left. There is Mis En Demeure, which is sort of like a very tony Pottery Barn—only a little more French and more creative, definitely snazzier than Habitat, but not weird and not Philippe Starck. It sells linen and some furniture.

Lingerie

Eve
Gray d'Albion.

This is really a cultural lesson in what French lingerie should be. First of all, like all good French lingerie shops, it sells bathing suits as well as underwear. Second, it carries extremely expensive goods so that Americans can faint dead away when

they see the prices. It also has pantyhose and bodysuits in stock. Even if you buy nothing, just watching the women who shop here is a real treat.

Local Heroes

Cannolive

16 and 20 rue Vénizélos.

I cannot in good conscience list this store as a tourist trap, although the undiscerning eye might question me on this. Cannolive is a celebration of local goods, items from the Riviera through Provence. One store is devoted mostly to foodstuffs (olive oil can be tasted and poured from a spigot here), while the other store, a few doors away, sells fabrics, *santons* (figures in a Christmas crèche), trays, and gift items. I could spend hours here.

Now, let's talk about the address. This is the correct address. The street is only called this particular proper name for 1 block, and, in fact, you are on this street (which is virtually unmarked) as you walk from Monoprix toward rue Meynadier. The stores are only 50m (164 ft.) from Monoprix—hidden in clear sight.

Cordonnier Bottier

51 rue Meynadier.

If you're looking for a pair of honest espadrilles, not the ones they sell at Hermès, this is the source. The shop looks so much like the local shoemaker that you wouldn't think to enter, but check it out.

Menswear

Andre Ghekiere

69 La Croisette.

André Ghekiere is preppy, but with a touch of the beach and a serious touch of the yacht crowd. It sells bathing costumes with matching robes and that sort of thing.

Claude Bonucci

Noga Hilton, 50 La Croisette.

Primarily a menswear designer, Bonucci is one of the last couturiers in the Riviera and certainly the most famous to locals who have the big bucks. He makes some women's clothing and sells handmade, ready-made clothes off the rack as well as bespoke (made-to-measure).

Aside from the fact that every known musician, cinema star, and festival-goer wears his clothes, his genius is for original elegance translated into the very distinctive rock 'n' roll of the Côte d'Azur. We're talking resort elegance, which is a hard thing to do without looking like you died and went to Palm Beach. This is the only man in France who can cut a men's suit in pale turquoise and make it work.

Although the clothes are expensive (870€/$1,000-plus for a silk blazer), Bonucci has a classic finesse that actually makes them worth the money. I've got to tell you, I was a skeptic at first, but after a fashion show and a serious browse through his stores, I'm hooked. Now I just need to win at the tables.

Next time you tour with your rock band, break the bank at Monte Carlo, or need to look absolutely with the team à la the local luxe, this need be your only stop.

Trabaud

48 rue d'Antibes.

Trabaud sells a modified version of Bonucci, but not handmade and not glitzy. This is where you come for those chic-er-than-thou linen blazers in just the right color of the season. The clothes have a preppy touch without being conservative: It's Ralph Lauren goes French resort.

Multiples & Chain Stores

Chacok

7 rue Commandant André.

Chacok has wild patterns and bright colors, good for resort wear.

ET VOUS
84 rue d'Antibes.

This is the Ann Taylor of France.

KOOKAI
18 rue d'Antibes.

Teen angel, can you hear me?

L'OCCITANE
14 rue du Maréchal Joffre.

This is a branch of the famed bath-goods store.

MARITHE ET FRANÇOIS GIRBAUD
Gray d'Albion.

$150 for a pair of jeans?

PIMKIE
42 rue d'Antibes.

Low-cost teen angel, can you hear me?

SEPHORA
53 bis rue d'Antibes.

Sephora has more makeup and scent than an airport.

ZARA
32 rue d'Antibes.

MUSIC

Musical recordings, be they records, tapes, or CDs, are usually frightfully expensive in France and aren't a tourist's best buy. However, if selection—not price—is the issue, you will be in heaven. There are scads of recordings that never come to the United States; there is also a bit of a business in bootleg tapes that were illegally recorded at events and then made into "real" CDs.

FNAC
83 rue d'Antibes.

This is everything you expect FNAC to be: music, tickets, and even computer supplies. It has books and a cafe, too.

Parapharmacies

Anglo-Française Pharmacie
95 rue d'Antibes.

This is a good place to warm up to the notion of a *parapharmacie* (large discount drugstore), and it's not far from the Noga. It doesn't carry a huge selection, but the store is spacious, so you can see everything and begin to learn brand names.

Paraland
22 rue Meynadier.

This is a small shop but has become sort of my regular because it's part of my ritual stroll from Marché Forville into town. I just wish it would open on Sunday. I stock up on my basics here: Lierac's Teint Lift Transparent and Galenic Orphycée Creme de Renovation Cellulaire.

Para Plus Pharmacie
113 rue d'Antibes.

This is a small *parapharmacie* located in the heart of town. It offers discounts on every purchase.

Perfume, Makeup & Soap

If you're going to Paris, wait 'til you get there for perfume, makeup, and soap—you'll find better prices at discounters like Catherine (see chapter 4). Otherwise, rue d'Antibes has several perfume shops; in the past few years a lot of them have merged into the **Marionaud** family, which discounts slightly for locals and tries to compete with Sephora (but doesn't have as many brands).

Bouteille

59 rue d'Antibes.

Bouteille has earned the reputation among locals as the best shop in town. It not only carries more luxury brands than any other shop, but also gets exclusive items and provides the kind of service and knowledge that you won't find in American supermarket-style stores.

Bouteille has the expected full range of designer names in fragrance and skin care, as well as some of the hard-to-find ones (like the special-edition releases and the collectors' bottles and groups). It carries Annick Goutal (which is not carried at Sephora), as well as Sisley and Bobbi Brown and, yes, Oh My Dog. It also offers fragrance for the home and scented candles from big designers such as Canovas and Rigaud, as well as scented madeleines for your drawers. It has recently started selling big, chunky, fabulous ethnic-style necklaces and accessories.

Bouteille is old-fashioned in its approach to service. Sephora is young and modern and American, but the salesgirls don't know a lot about skin or product. They're cute and they've been trained well, but they aren't experts who have a career in skin care. At Bouteille, they really know something and can give you treatment and product advice, which is especially important if you are over 35.

Bouteille is open on Monday, and it stays open during lunchtime. Of course, it does *détaxe,* too. And it gives out tons of little samples when you buy stuff.

By Terry

99 rue d'Antibes.

Terry's makeup has been a cult fave for years; those who can afford it know this, and the rest? Well, they don't even count, do they? You can get custom-created colors, of course, but there is also an off-the-rack selection—*cher,* but not as costly as the couture.

L'Occitane
14 rue du Maréchal Joffre.

L'Occitane is one of the most famous Provençal brands in the world, with global distribution and stores everywhere, including Paris, London, and the United States. It's been expanding like mad the past few years, and it now has a freestanding shop in Cannes. The line is enormous; you can go stark raving nuts with the touching and the sniffing of everything. This store is on the corner of the small part of rue Meynadier and the rue du Maréchal Joffre, between Monoprix and the regular pedestrian street rue Meynadier, a small 1- block offshoot of rue Meynadier.

Sephora
53 bis rue d'Antibes.

Sephora is a rather large chain, with stores all over the place—all of those branches are bigger and better than the one in Cannes. But if you've never been to a Sephora or you aren't going to another city, then well, well, well, have you got a treat in store.

Real-People Shopping

French pharmacies are designated by a neon green cross and carry most items you could need, including condoms. In fact, right on the rue d'Antibes, there's an outdoor condom machine in front of the **Lienhard Pharmacie** (no. 36). There are many nail salons, which do tips and what they call American-style manicures, but few are good. The best one I've found is **OngleStar,** 4 rue Chabaud (✆ **04-93-38-73-02**), which also does beauty treatments and waxing (a bikini wax is called a *maillot,* after the word for bathing suit in French). It's closed on Mondays, but otherwise open from 9am to 6:30pm; appointments are suggested.

You can buy feminine supplies at pharmacies, supermarkets, drugstores, and places like Monoprix. For some reason, the big hotels do not seem to have little sundries shops that sell these emergency items.

If you need inexpensive items—everything from pantyhose to sand buckets, beauty aids to picnic supplies—head for that one-stop-shopping haven: **Monoprix,** 9 rue Maréchal Foch, which also has a grocery store upstairs.

The **Cannes English Bookshop,** 11 rue Bivouac-Napoléon (near the Palais des Festivals), is in the heart of town. It's run by a lovely British man, so most of the English-language works are British; you'll have no trouble finding beach or travel pleasures.

There's a branch of **American Express** at 8 rue des Belges, right off La Croisette. There are ATMs all over town and exchange booths in most hotels.

If you need a liquor store and your hotel minibar just won't cut it, try **Sunshine,** 5 rue Maréchal Joffre, an excellent wine-and-spirits shop right in the heart of town with everything from favored vintages to Scotch single malts.

Shoes & Leather Goods

Of course you know about the big names such as Hermès, Gucci, Vuitton, and all that; even Chanel has handbags and shoes. These options are more specialty-related.

Charles Jourdan
47 rue d'Antibes.

Welcome, Patrick Cox! This Canadian designer reached shoe fame in London and has now taken over Charles Jourdan. Look out, Gigi!

Jacques Loup
21 rue d'Antibes.

This is the best place in town for shoes, with a roundup of every line including Prada (which is not sold at bargain prices, despite the fact that Italy is just an hour away). Excellent selection for men and women makes this good shopping for any need, from sandal to silk. Jacques Loup now has three shops in a row.

LANCEL
34 rue d'Antibes.

This is one of the fanciest boutiques on rue d'Antibes offering a terrific line of leather goods, from handbags to luggage. Items cost considerably less in France than in the United States. I like the fact that it often has unusual colors—I got an olive-green bag for fall and a honey-colored hemp bag for summer.

L'ETRIER
51 rue d'Antibes.

This is a rather average handbag shop with a few absolutely fabulous copies of big-name bags. This is the kind of store you might walk by without paying notice. Don't. A very good Kelly bag goes for about 174€ ($200).

SOUVENIRS, TTS & NOVELTY GIFTS

There are scads of TTs all over town. A few unusual stores sell gimmicky silly gifts that I guess you can only call souvenirs, although they may not have CANNES emblazoned on them. **Bathroom Graffitti,** 52 rue d'Antibes, is a chain of gift shops, and **Davis,** 1 La Croisette and Gray d'Albion, is an original kind of place that offers film-festival souvenirs, unusual items that you've never seen anywhere else, and all sorts of gadgets. Davis is open on Sunday.

I'm into kitsch and love the junky stores on the rue Meynadier that sell everything from lavender sachets to Provençal-print toilet-paper holders to snow domes made of plastic frogs.

If your idea of a souvenir is a memory you hold forever, perhaps you want to avoid the junk and sign up for a cooking class. **Ecole Lenôtre** has opened in Cannes, offering various workshops on myriad types of foods—not just chocolates. For information, call ✆ **04-97-06-67-67.**

Special Sizes

Marina Rinaldi
15 rue des Serbes.

This small shop carries a selection of Italian maker Max Mara's casual, business, and dress-up line, in sizes 42 to 56.

GRASSE

Now that I've fallen in love with chef Jacques Chibois, I welcome you to Grasse with new enthusiasm. I used to have a love-hate thing with Grasse. I mean, I can't imagine that you would come this close and miss the opportunity to visit a town that represents the perfume business. But I am sad to send you to the mostly touristy places that make up the town, and I am appalled at how much the city has changed in recent years in order to accommodate the tour buses.

But here's the good part: When I know I can also send you to eat (and even sleep) chez Chibois, my heart sings. I also think I need a drink, as Jacques has gotten me hooked on a local brew, *vin cuit,* that is heaven in a glass. Plus, the *brocante* market held on Wednesday is wonderful.

If you've been to Grasse and have memories of it, or if you're perusing an old guidebook, forget anything you know about the old system wherein the many perfume houses in town sold copycat fragrances. Nowadays there are no copycat fragrances, no charts saying "If you like Chanel No. 5 you will like . . . ," and no little vials of anything that smell suspiciously like the real thing. So the Grasse I welcome you to is far different than it used to be or than you imagine it to be.

Getting to Grasse

If you haven't got a car, you can take public transportation from Cannes. I took the bus once—great fun. If you're driving, follow the signs for **Monoprix**—in so doing, you'll get a tour of

the town and know which fork to take every time you have a choice of roads. Then you can park in the Monoprix parking lot and explore the heart of the old town on foot.

The Lay of the Land

Grasse is located a little more than 15km (9 miles) from Cannes, perched in the hills slightly to the north. It is the industrial and emotional heart of the perfume industry.

There is a sort of downtown Grasse, even a cute street in Old Grasse. However, most of the center of Grasse is neither cute nor charming; it's just vertical. It sprawls up and down and around and feels like the kind of place where you can get lost without having fun being lost.

You don't come to Grasse for the cute; you come for Chibois and the perfumes. So if you have fantasies about fields of poppies or the smell of flowers in the air or friendly worker bees in cute native dress with baskets on their heads, you can think again. Picture instead TTs, tour buses, and zillions of schoolchildren wearing name tags.

Shopping for Scent

Grasse is not one enormous duty-free shop, nor is it nearly as much fun as any branch of the French makeup chain Sephora. You don't come to Grasse to get discounts on designer perfume or to find a bigger or better selection of designer anything. In fact, Grasse is not a designer fragrance town as far as tourists are concerned.

The big names don't allow you to enter their factories or to sniff their poppies. Even though Chanel keeps its own fields to grow its own flowers in order to ensure their purity and that of their essence, Chanel does not appear to be represented to the public in any form.

What Grasse does have are a few renovated mansions that have been turned into museums and shops selling their own brands. What Grasse does have are a lot of tour buses. Power to the petals.

GRASSE ON TOUR

Grasse is included in an enormous number of package tours, including shore excursions offered by cruise lines that come to port along the Riviera. Like most package tours, these are marriages between one perfume house and the firm offering the tour.

You will not be able to cope with more than one factory tour—how perfume is made is fascinating only once. (Sort of like the "How Wine Is Made" speech.) Note that tours at all of the big factories are free and are offered in a variety of languages.

THE BIG THREE

Grasse has three big names in the tourist perfume factory business. Two of these names have factory shops in other parts of the Riviera. I have ranked the big three according to my opinion of their charms.

MOLINARD

60 bd. Victor Hugo.

There's no question that Molinard is the classiest of the big three. If you're going to only one of the three houses, this is the one to pick.

The villa in which the showroom is housed is gorgeous; the costumes in their museum arcades are gorgeous; some of the scents are even gorgeous.

The house has a full range of lines, most of which are sold at Bergdorf Goodman in New York and a few other fancy-dan shops. Most Americans are not familiar with the perfume house itself or any of its brands. Not to worry.

Perhaps its most famous scent is Habanita, which comes in a very distinctive (and highly collectible) Lalique bottle. This is the kind of scent you either love or hate. My favorite part of the collection is a complete line called Les Senteurs, which is a range of *eaux de toilette* made from natural flowers, spices, or herbs, such as vanilla, lime, orange, and cinnamon.

There is even a baby scent, Les Cherubins, for the baby who has everything.

Molinard conducts a perfume-making workshop, usually booked by small groups and arranged ahead of time, whereby you can create your very own scent. To arrange your perfume workshop, fax **04-93-36-03-91.**

FRAGONARD
20 bd. Fragonard.
Les 4 Chemins, route de Cannes and Eze village.

Fragonard sort of owns Grasse; it has two shops/factories in Grasse, one downtown and one on the road from Cannes. There are two other retail factories: one in Eze village and one in Paris near American Express on rue Scribe.

Fragonard's main headquarters is in a magnificently restored villa in the heart of town; its museum and tour are excellent. I just don't happen to like the products very much.

Pick up the free literature distributed in hotels or tourist venues, and you'll likely find a discount coupon for 5% off your purchases here.

GALIMARD
73 route de Cannes.

Galimard has a little-old-lady type of showroom in downtown Grasse and a big factory-style outlet on the road outside town. There is also a shop in Eze.

JUAN-LES-PINS

Time stopped in Juan-les-Pins: It's still 1962, and this lazy little village with the big-time chef and razzle-dazzle Deco hotel is one of the few authentic towns left on the French Riviera. What's so amazing is that this town is not a secret, yet it has remained unspoilt.

Maybe unspoilt is not the right word. Deliciously spoilt but not overly touristy might be the right description. After all, this is the town that is a small but vital character in the book *Bergdorf Blondes,* which provides the inside scoop on the jet set and how many pairs of shoes they can buy in only a few minutes in Juan-les-Pins.

If you have ever lamented the traffic, the out-of-towners, the sweaty kids being towed along, the crassness of the boom-town Riviera cities, I welcome you to the last hurrah, the last small-town big-time city where the glamour is real and the emotions are almost unreal because it all feels so fresh. Grab an ice-cream cone and let's promenade.

Welcome to Juan-les-Pins, which is slightly off the beaten path and therefore has preserved its charm. Welcome to a suburb of Cannes, hidden before Antibes, and nestled against the sea in its own little world.

Part of the reason for this town's success as a glam zone is that it is not far from the Hôtel du Cap in Antibes, which is celebrity headquarters—and has been since the time of Scott and Zelda. Think Great Neck, mid-60s.

Hmmm, no—remember the summer of 1960 when I stayed with Grandma Jessie in Miami Beach—waaaaay before Miami Beach became what it is today? That's the feel: beach town, in soft focus yet seductive.

Secret Flash

Just as you are to know without being told that the Hôtel du Cap (called simply "du Cap") only takes cash, you must know how to pronounce Juan-les-Pins. If you're thinking of the Spanish pronunciation of Juan *(Wan),* cut it out. This is France. You pronounce the *J,* so say *Ju-wan-le-Pan.*

Getting to Juan-les-Pines

You will miss Juan-les-Pins if you don't look for it. Forget cruising on the autoroute A8. Instead, from Cannes take the (free) coastal road N7 east—the Route 66 of France—and follow signs

toward Antibes until you get to a fork marked Juan-les-Pins. This is a small sign and easily missed.

Juan is not the next obvious coastal slash of beach huts and condos (that happens to be the town of Golfe Juan). A little further along, you'll see a full-fledged town with one-way streets, a casino, and just the right amount of scruffy charm to it.

But silly me, giving you directions. Your chauffeur knows the way. (As the driver also knows, Juan is 20 min. from the Nice airport.)

Oh yes, there is actually a train, so you can also come and go as a day trip. But that's beside the point. The point is to hide behind your shade and never leave. The train station is at the edge of town, but is easily within walking distance of the shops and the sea.

The Lay of the Land

The entire town is tiny, but in no way a one-street gig or anything boring. The beaches are 200m (656 ft.) from the center of town; often you can get a hotel room with a beach view. The beach is also the end of the shopping promenade, so you can shop to see and sea. Urrgh, excuse me. I get carried away here. Sea drunk.

To make it more interesting for you, the town has many curving streets and alleys, places to explore, and shopping just about everywhere. If you have feet (all those shoe stores) or eyes (time for window-licking, as the French say), you won't be bored.

Sleeping in Juan-les-Pines

Hotel Juana

La Pinède, av. Gallice.

First, the warning: The La Pinède in the address is a part of town, near the pine-tree area for which the town is named. Do not mistakenly attempt to check into the hotel called La Pinède, as I did. How I could check into any other hotel is

beyond comprehension, but the Juana was hidden by some pine trees, and the wrong hotel was pretty cute in a funky way.

After three phone calls, the concierge rescued me, I drove around the casino and the pines, and I immediately fell in love with this midsize yellow villa with Art Deco trim. I'd booked here not only because of the fame of the kitchen (Alain Ducasse started here), but also because the hotel had just undergone a face-lift and is now as sleek as a Deco ocean liner. For more on the chef, see the review of La Terrasse, below.

Now then, the hotel—one of those secret leading small boutique places with a multi-star Michelin chef. It's been home to celebs like Bill Cosby, Ray Charles, Johnny Depp, and the like. But forget those stars—instead, think of the chef and the new beach club.

In the main hotel, the rooms are sleek, moderne, air-conditioned (of course), and Deco-ed up to magazine-page perfection. The charming cage elevator is enclosed in glass; the flowers are inventive and sophisticated—a true homage to floral arts and not just your average hotel bouquet. Dining options include the famous restaurant, La Terrasse, and a little bistro.

The 40-room hotel is open year-round; rates vary with the season, but begin at 230€ ($265) per night. Local phone ✆ **04-93-61-08-70.** www.hotel-juana.com.

LE MERIDIEN GARDEN BEACH

15–17 bd. Baudoin.

I'm sure this is a nice hotel; I'm a big fan of Le Meridien hotels worldwide. This one is located next to the casino and overlooking the beach. It's modern and glitzy on the outside, and looks a little out of place. Once inside, though, you can easily forget all that.

Rates vary with promotions, but start around 250€ ($288). From the U.S., call ✆ **866/559-3821.** Local phone ✆ 04-92-93-57-57. www.lemeridien.com.

Eating in Juan-les-Pins

You can snack and shop your way through town, as there are plenty of pizza places, crepe joints, and ice-cream stores. But part of the point of this town is to not snack, but seriously eat.

La Terrasse

Hôtel Juana, av. Gallice.

He looks like Salvador Dali, but he cooks like the Wizard of Oz: Christian Morisset has been the talk of the Côte d'Azur for going on 20 years as he just keeps on earning his two Michelin stars. You can dine inside or out, at lunch or dinner—but you must be dressed and ready to be seen while acting like you don't give autographs.

In between bites, you can sneak a peak at the foodies who come to worship and the smart shoppers who know there's a fixed-price lunch at under 50€ ($58) per person. The souvenir of your trip south just may be the clay plaque that comes with the saddle of Pauillac lamb, which the chef bakes in Vallauris clay—sort of like the number on your duck at Tour d'Argent in Paris.

Obviously, reservations are imperative. In season or during the film festival, book as far in advance as possible by calling ✆ **04-93-61-08-70.**

Les Pecheurs

10 bd. Maréchal Juin.

Enjoy beachside eating in this gourmet restaurant at the Hôtel Juana's beach club. You can have lunch or dinner on the glassed-in terrace year-round, or sit outdoors between June and September. Reserve through the Hôtel Juana, above.

Shopping in Juan-les-Pines

The point here is to roam around and shop as you go. The city is big on fashion for young women (with cigarette-slim bodies), shoes and sandals, bathing suits, accessories, and home

style. There's a large TT (Librarie du Casino) that sells books in many languages as well as real-people needs such as sunglasses, toys, beach stuff, office supplies, and postcards. There are two supermarkets in the heart of town for picnic needs. You'll see plenty of beach-pail stores, as expected, but these kinds of things are less costly at the supermarket, if you care.

There are perhaps a handful of freestanding, big-name boutiques—most of which are known for young and casual clothes or beachwear, such as Diesel, NafNaf, Blanc Bleu, Reminscense, and Villequin. All of these brands also have stores in Cannes and in most other French Riviera towns.

Mostly, you'll find tiny shops that sell a few brands or others that provide their own version of the look. Designers come here to copy that look. This is a town where shops have names like Spicy, Cappuccino, and Pam-Pam.

ANTIBES

I welcome you to Antibes if you come out of season. I welcome you to Antibes in summer if you come by yacht. Okay, you can come by train anytime. Otherwise, watch out, I don't think you want to even be welcomed here—you won't find a parking place, and the traffic may make you nuts. If you're game and don't care about the crush, any day is a good day. But the best and most crowded days are Thursday and Saturday, *brocante* days.

On Thursdays, there are actually two markets in Antibes: antiques and Provençale. The latter sells foods as well as some local crafts and souvenir-type items; it is held under a covered market roof. The antiques market is small, outdoors, and runs along the street, just a few yards from the covered market.

On Saturdays, there are also two markets, but of different sorts (antiques and real-people needs). The real-people market is along the waterfront; the antiques market is in the center of the old town. They're not far apart, but they do not merge

and no neon signs indicate that there are two types of venues for your shopping pleasure.

The real-people market, where new merchandise is sold, is right on the waterfront and rambles through a parking lot or two. Here you can find a few pieces of *brocante,* but mostly new household and clothing items. A few tables sell factory overruns. One dealer has fake Hermès-style handbags.

The real flea market, held at a midpoint in the Old Town, consists of just a few dealers who lay out their wares on the pavement. The thing that disappoints me about this flea market is there are so few dealers. I will add that in all my research in all of the flea markets that I scoped out in France, this market had the lowest asking prices on traditional French merchandise.

If you arrive in Antibes by yacht or cruise ship, you will tie up at the Port Vauban, which has just been jazzed up and has two new *quais*. From here, you can walk directly into Old Town. This is the best way to enjoy Antibes.

BIOT

There is some discussion as to how to properly pronounce the name of this small town—some pronounce all the letters including even the final *t,* while others say "B.O.," dropping the final *t*. Regardless, you'll find most shoppers come here for the glass factory, which is not in the heart of town.

Downtown itself is only about 2 blocks long. Although the main street is lined with TTs, they are exactly the kind of places you expect to see and actually want to see. Several TTs sell locally made monochromatic pottery. There's also an abundance of Provençal fabrics, sold by the bolt or made up into table items, clothing, and accessories—everything from glasses cases to toilet-paper holders. Several cafes are here as well.

The glass factory, **La Verrerie de Biot** (Chemin des Combes, right outside Biot center), has been made famous to Americans

because its bubble-encrusted glassworks are often featured on tables set with Pierre Deux or Souleiado linen. There's no question that the glassware is nice, but it is also very expensive. The store ships, but shipping will double the prices (already high) and subject you to additional American duty. To complicate matters, the store does not ship items bought from the bargain corner, where you can actually find some true bargains. So if you get lucky with a bargain, be prepared to schlep it.

Final note: You can buy much less expensive bubble glass—even in colors—at various home-style shops in the U.S. and throughout France. Within France, check out sources such as Geneviève Lethu, Pier 1, Alinea, and Casa.

VALLAURIS

Years ago, I would have extended a warm welcome to Vallauris, a city I have enjoyed. I would have welcomed you to the place where Picasso got into the lay of the clay, where studios selling locally made dishes dished out their wares, where the name Studio Madoura meant something. Today: Phooey. Yankee, go home.

The town is loaded with tourists, the TTs are overwhelming, and the soul of the city has been destroyed by crass commercialism. Yuck. Or tee-hee yuck. Last time I was in town, I ate at McDonald's.

If you insist on visiting Vallauris, I can tell you that there are plenty of places to shop. Few of them are charming, but here and there you'll find a few special resources.

The main drag is avenue Georges Clemenceau; check out the part with the higher numbers (like 65 bis) rather than the lower numbers, which tend to be more touristy.

My favorite shop from years ago is still open and wonderful: **Foucard-Jourdan,** 65 bis av. G. Clemenceau. You'll have to look hard to find it, even though it's in plain sight, because

of all the junky stores that have been built up along the way. I also like **Potterie Provençal,** 54 av. G. Clemenceau.

Because of the overwhelming number of TTs, all with merchandise spilling out of their stores and piled high on the curbs, you'll be tempted to do some of your souvenir shopping here. Compared to elsewhere in France, prices on souvenir items in Vallauris are actually quite good. Have lavender sachets, will travel.

ST-PAUL-DE-VENCE

Welcome, welcome, and again welcome to St-Paul-de-Vence, a tourist town that knows how to get it right. This is the kind of place where the shopping is so adorable that you know it's all been created for tourists, not locals—but you almost don't mind simply because it's all so beautiful.

On the whole, the shopping scene within the walls of this medieval town is what you would expect—lots of TTs selling everything from postcards to plastic swords and armor. There are some art galleries with high prices and a handful of very nice boutiques dotted here and there, so even a person with a real sense of style can get a sense of well-being when out strolling and window-shopping the rue Grande.

What seems to make the difference here is the level of taste: This is a town for rich tourists with good taste. There's nothing tacky about it. Chocolatier **Joël Durand** (3 bd. Victor Hugo) has opened a shop here, immediately changing the taste level to higher than yummy. A few stores sell cheap tricks, but the good fabric houses are in place, and the overall quality of the goods and the storefronts seduces the visitor into thinking that this is not an ordinary tourist town.

Les Olivades (1 rue Grande) and **Souleiado** (17 rue Grande), the two biggest names in quality Provençal fabrics, have boutiques on the cobbled main shopping street. **L'Air du Sud** (56 rue Grande) is an extraordinary store—a local dollop of design,

crafts, color, and the look of the south of France in tabletop and gift items.

But wait, I forgot to tell you that St-Paul is open—and I mean wide open—on Sunday!

Out of Town

MAISON DES ARTS

10 rue Maréchal Foch, La Colle sur Loup.

If you've dreamed about an arts-and-crafts camp for grown-ups, search no more: The find of your dreams is located right outside St-Paul-de-Vence, in the village of La Colle sur Loup. There are painting workshops, cooking workshops, and ceramics workshops. You can stay with the hosts on a bed-and-breakfast deal or you can make your own hotel arrangements. Classes last 1 week; there are in- and out-of-season prices, but the resident fee for a single room in high season is about 1,000€ ($1,150), which includes everything. Oh yes, the hosts and professors are British, so don't expect too many language problems. ✆ **04-93-32-32-50.** www.maisondesarts.com.

MOULIN DE LA BRAQUE

2 route de Châteauneuf, Opio.

A movie set couldn't look better than the Moulin Huile Michel, also known as the Moulin de la Braque (it's owned by Roger Michel, hence the two names). The mill makes olive oil and sells a varieties of olives, olive oil, and olive-oil products such as soap. It also sells some fabric, some touristy items, and a few gifts. But you come for the olives.

The oil is sold in any number of tins, and can also be tasted, tested, and bought straight from the vat. If you bring your own container, it costs less. If you were so silly as to leave your container at home, you can pick from a number of types, sizes, and packages. (Remember that tins are easier to pack than glass bottles.) Hours are 9am to noon and 2 to 7pm. ✆ **04-93-77-23-03.**

NICE

Welcome to a town where you can indeed have a very Nice day, or several. Even if you just come to Nice on a day trip or a shore excursion, I think you're going to like it. The better part of Nice can be seen in a day.

To best enjoy the town, don't focus on shopping—just let it happen. Although rue Paradis is the main pedestrian shopping street, I don't find it paradise at all. I think it's sort of limited, in fact. Cannes has better big-name shopping than Nice, so don't shrug and wonder where paradise has gone. True paradise is around the corner, in Old Nice. Step this way.

I must also say at this point that my 25-year-old son Aaron, who reports for these pages, thinks the teen-tween shopping in Nice is better than elsewhere in the Riviera because the prices are more real-people, there's not so much glam and hype, and there are plenty of big stores with large stocks of mid-price, non-designer names.

Getting to Nice

You can fly directly to the Nice–Côte d'Azur Airport from New York, via Delta.

To get to Nice from Paris, there are regular shuttle flights via Air France called La Navette (the shuttle), departing from both Paris Orly and CDG. At press time, EasyJet also serves Nice, but so many low-cost carriers have gone out of business that you'd better check the website (www.easyjet.com) for the latest info.

Many other carriers serve this airport, so Nice can be used as a hub city for getting around the Mediterranean basin. I use Nice for easily getting to Morocco and Tunisia. Libya isn't yet on my must-do list, but you never know.

You can also get here by train, which is called a TGV though not all of the fast track is yet in place. The ride, at its swiftest, is 5 hours 33 minutes from Paris—and is likely to be longer.

Nice is also a train hub for overnight trips—this is a gateway for Italian cities and many in the new Europe.

Finally, you can arrive in Nice from Corsica by ferry, which comes to dock right near a candy factory.

Getting Around Nice

Warning: Taxi fares are outrageously expensive and controlled by some higher deity. There is little competition and not much room for bargaining. A taxi from the Nice airport to a hotel on the Promenade des Anglais—about a 7-minute drive—will easily cost 30€ ($35). There are supplemental charges for baggage, dogs, and night-time service.

I think the trick to getting around Nice is to stay in a well-situated hotel so you can walk everywhere. Even if you have a car, you might find that parking is hard to get. (Although, I found that parking tickets were easy to get.) Expect overnight parking in a covered lot to cost 30€ ($35) per night, or more.

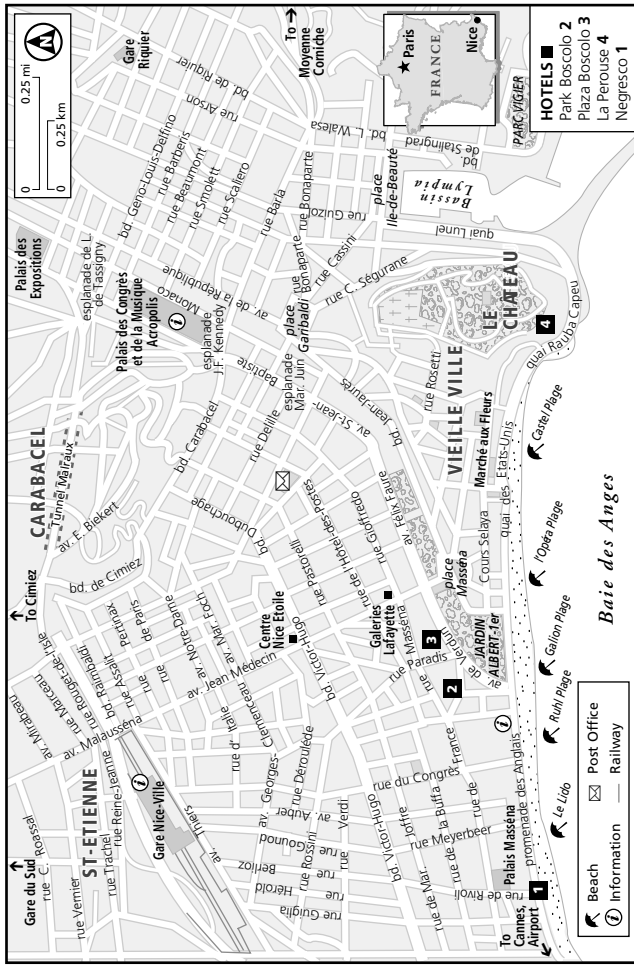
For some shopping parts of Nice, like the antiques neighborhood, you'll need to drive or take a taxi. Otherwise, everything is accessible on foot.

Sleeping in Nice

The biggest excitement in town is not related to the opening or re-opening of any one store—although the arrival of the second Lafayette Maison, after the first store opened in Paris, is considered a big deal. The news is about hotels.

First of all, there's the **Palais de la Méditerranée,** 15 promenade des Anglais (✆ **04-92-14-77-02;** www.lepalaisdelamediterranee.com), which is under the same ownership as palace hotels like the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris and the Hôtel Martinez in Cannes. This new luxury hotel has been created directly behind a landmark Art Deco facade, sitting smack dab on the promenade des Anglais. Don't miss a chance to gawk. Rates begin at 245€ ($282).

If you are indeed a hotel junky, as I am, you might also want to look in on the **Hi Hôtel,** 3 av. des Fleurs (✆ **04-97-07-26-27;** www.hi-hotel.net). It's one of those new-fangled boutique hotels that offer cutting-edge chic and open bathrooms. Rates start at 145€ ($167).



On the edge of the Old Town, the **Hôtel Beau Rivage,** 24 rue St-François de Paule (✆ **04-92-47-82-82;** www.nicebeaurivage.com), has been redone—after being closed for a year—and is now very modern and boutique-hotelish with a great location. Rates start at 140€ ($161).

HOTEL LA PEROUSE
11 quai Rauba-Capéu.

This is not a great shopping location if you aren't a walker, but the hotel is perched above Old Town, with a stairway leading up and down. It's also perched right over the sea, so the views are incredible. This is the funky luxury hotel of your dreams. Rack rates start at around 245€ ($282). From the U.S., contact Yellin Hotels (www.yellinhotels.com). Local phone ✆ 04-93-62-34-63. www.hotel-la-perouse.com.

HOTEL NEGRESCO
37 promenade des Anglais.

Although Cannes has an international reputation for its Belle Epoque sugar-plum hotels, Nice has one or two left, too. The most famous of them is the Hôtel Négresco, which is downright sumptuous inside and out.

Located right on the promenade des Anglais and overlooking the sea, the Négresco is within walking distance of everything and is considered the place to be. Every star in the world has stayed here, and Richard Burton even accidentally left Liz's 69-carat diamond on the bar one night. The Beatles wrote a hit song here.

Rooms begin around 250€ ($288) per night, but they come with gold-sparkle bidets. Honest. There are also promotional rates. Staying here is one of the world's best treats because the decor is so over the top and the mixture of old-world grandeur with modern art so stunning—and silly.

If you just stop by to stare, have a drink in the English-style bar. Go to the ladies' room; you've never seen a bathroom like this, I promise. There are some stores in the lobby; use them as an excuse to poke around. The hotel shows its devotion to mixing neoclassical architecture with modern art with a Niki de Saint Phalle statue of a jazz player outside on the curb.

For reservations from the United States, call Leading Hotels of the World at ✆ **800/223-6800.** Local phone 04-93-88-39-51. www.hotel-negresco-nice.com.

Hotel Park Boscolo
6 av. de Suède.

Another Boscolo hotel and one whose renovation has been totally completed, the Park is around the corner from the Plaza and across the street from one of my favorite restaurants in Nice, La Cigale. Better still, the rooms are large, some have ocean views, and rates are even lower than at the Plaza (starting at around 175€/$201). The Park is smaller than the Plaza and has a more boutique-hotel feel. From the U.S., call ✆ **888/626-7265.** Local phone ✆ 04-97-03-19-00. www.boscolohotels.com.

Hotel Plaza Boscolo
12 av. Verdun.

I've been staying at this hotel for over a dozen years and seen it change management and styles. As we go to press, I beg you to insist on (and confirm) a renovated room if you book here—or else wait for word that all rooms have been renovated. The lobby is now spiffy moderne; the renovated rooms are large and well done, many with ocean views. The location couldn't be more perfect: steps from the rue Paradis, around the corner from Galeries Lafayette, and an easy walk to Old Town and the promenade des Anglais.

The hotel is now owned by Boscolo, an Italian group of hoteliers with four-star and four-star-deluxe hotels around the world. I've seen so many properties that this has become a group that I believe in. The best deals depend on availability, of course, but can be booked online for about 185€ ($213) per night; otherwise expect to pay about 250€ ($288). From the U.S., call ✆ **888/626-7265.** Local phone ✆ 04-93-16-75-75. www.boscolohotels.com.

Eating in Nice

Fennochio
15 rue Droite, place Rossetti, Old Town.

This is the most famous ice-cream shop on the French Riviera. Try the lavender or the tomato-basil flavor.

LA CIGALE ORIENTALE
7 av. de Suède.

This is perhaps my favorite new restaurant concept in France—a restaurant-cum-store-cum-takeaway department. The menu is Mediterranean but with a twist—it concentrates on foods from areas like Lebanon, Egypt, and Greece. You can walk in off the street, but reservations are better: Call ✆ **04-93-88-60-20.** There's a second location in the Cap 3000 mall on the edge of Nice (p. 303).

LA MERANDA
4 rue de la Terrasse, Old Town.

No credit cards, no reservations—and no phone. Stop by in the morning on your way to market and reserve for lunch or dinner. Two-star chef Dominique LeStanc gave up the big time to open this teeny-weeny bistro serving local fare. Closed weekends, school holidays, and the month of August.

LE CHANTECLER
Hôtel Negresco, 37 promenade des Anglais.

Part of the new story of the rotating chefs in the south of France: Alain Llorca has left Chantecler to move to Mougins, while Michel Del Burgo, from Taillevant in Paris, has moved in. *Ooh la la* never tasted so good.

Shopping in Nice

BEST BUYS

Although my son says this town is great for mass-market French brands for the under-30 set, I think the best buys are more related to local lore—and food at that. I'd go for olive oil, *fruits confits,* rose or jasmine jam, or even the local wine, named Bellet.

Shopping Neighborhoods

NICE AIRPORT For a small airport, this has very good shopping. Half of the stores are located near the gates after you've gone through immigration. The other half are located before the immigration gates, so even if you don't go through immigration because you're on an intra-Euro flight, you can still shop. The offerings include a tiny **Hermès** boutique (where I've found things at fair prices), a newsagent, a duty-free store, a shop that sells Provençal fabric–style souvenirs, and a gourmet grocery for fresh cheeses, olive oil, and so on.

Right near the airport (which is technically not in Nice, but in St-Laurent-du-Var) is a large regional mall called **Cap 3000** (say *Cap trois mille*). While this American-style mall may bore you to tears, it can be a great way to see a lot of French brands in the comfort of air-conditioning. There's a new **MAC** store here as well as a branch of **La Cigale** in the Lafayette Gourmet (see p. 302 for a review of La Cigale Orientale). **Lafayette Maison,** a home-style store also owned by Galeries Lafayette, has just opened.

COURS SALEYA You can have the rest of Nice, I'll keep the airport and the cours Saleya, the main square in the heart of the Old Town, where a flower-and-vegetable market is held every day (yes, Sun, too) except Monday, which is *brocante* day.

I cannot tell you that this is the cutest town square in France or that the Old Town is adorable and worthy of a postcard. The fact that the area is real and not perfect explains some of the charm.

The visual here is color, from striped awnings to gorgeous fruits and flowers. Several cafes that line the way make for the perfect opportunity to stop, have a coffee, stare, and wonder at the fact that this is a way of life for some people.

In the market stands, you'll find a variety of prices for seemingly the same things. Don't buy until you've surveyed the lot. This is one of the best fruit-and-flower markets in the south of France; go out of your way to get here.

Old Town (Vieux Nice) is adjacent to the market, so be sure to allow time for both.

VIEUX NICE This is the Old Town, comprising a small warren of streets surrounding the cours Saleya. You do the two together. Again, I won't tell you that this is the most picturesque old town in France or even on the Riviera. It's actually kind of gritty. But therein lies the charm. You can believe.

With any luck, you're staying at a hotel on the promenade des Anglais or right in the center of town, so you can walk to this area. There's something fabulous about strolling along the ocean side of the promenade and then cutting into the Old Town and coming upon these old-fashioned little stores and TTs as if you were in a dream.

If you're driving and arrive for the day, look for the municipal parking right at the cours Saleya. A computerized sign above the lot tells you how many spaces are available. If the lot is full, the sign will say *complet*. If you park here, do take time to wander over 1 block to see the ocean and the promenade.

QUAI DE LA DOUANE This is the antiques neighborhood. On a map it looks like it's an easy walk from the cours Saleya. However, because of the size of Le Château, on a mountain between the two parts of town, you'll be happier if you take a taxi. Ask for Le Marché Aux Puce du quai de la Douane, and you will be dropped where you need to be. The *marché* has about 18 stalls and isn't impressive, but there is a candy factory next door (**Confiserie du Vieux Nice,** 14 quai Papacino), plus many more warehouses of antiques around the corner. So don't panic. The candy factory is small, but it gives tours and sells samples. It makes chocolates and *fruits confits;* upstairs is a rather large shop with free tastings and great products to take home for gifts, including items such as jasmine jam.

Don't panic that addresses seem strange here; there are 3 blocks that run alongside the tiny boat harbor, and each block has a different name. But don't bury your nose in a map; sniff the air and look around. This is a part of town that's virtually unknown to tourists.

Walk alongside the quay for antiques shops and cafes (ignore the karaoke bars), and then turn left onto rue Antoine Gautier for a 2-block stretch filled with warehouses of used furniture and antiques. Most of the places here will ship your purchases; few dealers speak English. The specialty in these warehouses is large pieces of furniture. Prices, even with shipping added, are at least half of what you would pay for similar pieces in the U.S. Prices are listed, but the more you buy, the more flexible the dealer will become. The warehouses all keep more or less the same hours: Monday through Saturday from 9am to 12:30pm and 2:30 to 7pm.

PARADIS The main fancy shopping street of Nice is called rue Paradis. I don't know how to break this to you gently, but if you think this is paradise, you have come to the wrong book. Don't get me wrong; there's nothing wrong with the rue Paradis or with the stores that are on this 2-block stretch of upper-class French mall. It's just that when a street has a name like that, one has hopes. But this street is boring, filled with the usual suspects: Chanel, Sonia Rykiel, Montblanc, Façonnable, and so on.

VERDUN Forget the battle, and remember your brand names—everything from Gerard Darel to Escada with many others along the way, all in a row surrounding the Hôtel Plaza.

REAL-PEOPLE MASSENA Rue Paradis is a short little street in the greater pedestrian shopping cluster of downtown that branches off away from the main shopping thoroughfare. Place Masséna, with **Galeries Lafayette,** is the anchor of this shopping area. However, the bulk of the neighborhood is off to one side, past rue Paradis and snuggled behind a portion of promenade des Anglais. Note that one of the perimeters of this shopping district is the rue Verdun, which becomes avenue Félix-Faure, another main drag. Check a map to see how the streets converge and intersect.

Some of the stores here are branches of real-people shops that sell cheap shoes and sportswear. Most of them are TTs, cafes, and pizza places. I just love it back here because it's very real. But you will never confuse it with Cannes.

On the surface, all this looks tacky and cheap. That's because most of the good stuff is hidden. On the very side streets that sell the T-shirts, and along the boring rue Paradis and rue Masséna, there are a few addresses that will knock your socks off once you get inside.

As is the tradition in many places in France and Italy, local boutiques sell many of the bigger names. Check out spots like **Pink** (rue de France), **Jelly** (place Magenta), and **Claude Bonucci** (rue Massenet), which sells Claude Bonucci made-to-measure clothes from a very small and discreet shop. Bonucci, with additional shops in Cannes, makes old-fashioned, finely tailored togs for rock stars, movie stars, and the Riviera elite.

REAL-PEOPLE MEDECIN A spoonful of shopping makes the Médecin go down, even if the shopping has very little glamour and represents the basic multiples and real-people resources. Avenue Jean Médecin is where you'll find the chain stores **FNAC** (which sells CDs, tapes, and books), **Zara, Sephora, La Redoute,** and **Monoprix;** these branches are larger than the ones in Cannes. The train station is right off this main thoroughfare. You can easily walk along it, shopping your way to the rue Paradis, the place Masséna, the cours Saleya, and everywhere else.

FINDS

ALZIARI
14 rue St-François-de-Paule, Old Town.

If I had to pick just one store, one place that best captures the soul of what shopping in the south of France should be, I would send you to this hole-in-the-wall little mill, where you can buy olives, olive oil, and olive-oil soap. The olive oil, famed for the design and colors of its royal-blue can, is sold outside Nice in gourmet stores for two to three times what it costs here. If you can't get to the mill in the Old Town, note that the gourmet-food shop in the Nice airport sells two sizes of the olive oil. It's not cheap, even in Nice, but it does make a very special souvenir.

Auer
7 rue St-François-de-Paule, Old Town.

This ice-cream parlor and sweets shop looks like a movie set. It will enchant you as you study the storefront and then again when you step inside. You can have tea or get an ice-cream cone or do what generations of tourists before you have done: Send off some local sweets to your friends back home. Check out the mailing labels.

Blanc d'Ivoire
Rue de la Préfecture, Old Town.

This home-style store sells newly made quilts to look like the old French *boutis* (bed quilts). Very chic: You get a touch of Provence without going too over-the-top.

Custo Barcelona
23 rue de la Préfecture, Old Town.

Custo, the cutting-edge maker of T-shirts from Barcelona, has had international distribution through department stores for years; now it has opened its first shop in France, right in Nice's Old Town. Besides the iconic T-shirts, there are clothes and accessories for men and women.

Le Moulin des Caracoles
5 rue St-François-de-Paule, Old Town.

Of the several TTs in a row in this part of the Old Town, this one is my favorite because I like the shop, the merchandise, the display, the wrap, and even the business cards. This is where I buy packaged olives (airtight; they can legally be brought into the U.S.) as well as some gift items.

L'Olive
7 rue St-François-de-Paule, Old Town.

This spiffy shop is so chic that you will easily grasp the fashion statement now made by designer and prestige olive oils. Open Sunday mornings but not Monday mornings.

MARGAUX
10 rue de la Liberté.

Margaux is a small shop that sells only white and black blouses, T-shirts, and tops—a la Anne Fontaine, but less expensive.

MOLINARD
20 rue St-François-de-Paule, Old Town.

This is the newest showroom of the perfume house from Grasse.

YVES DELORME
Centre Commercial Nice Etoile, av. Jean Médecin.

This large shopping mall has branches of many big name brands, but is particularly useful as a way to shop for bed linens from Yves Delorme, a French brand with little distribution in the U.S. and a nice selection of luxury linens and duvet covers. Remember, French bed sizes do not match American bed sizes, but duvet covers will work just fine.

MARKETS & FAIRS

Nice has a plethora of markets:

- **Fruits and flowers:** Daily except Monday, cours Saleya, from 7am.
- ***Brocante:*** Monday, cours Saleya, from 7am. More than 200 dealers. Year-round.
- **Antiques:** Daily except Sunday, quai de la Douane, from 11am to 7pm. About 18 stalls. Year-round.
- **Used and old books:** First and third Saturday of each month, place du Palais du Justice, from 8am to 5pm. The first Sunday is old books; the third Sunday is postcards and ephemera. Some 24 stalls. Year-round.
- **Carnaval:** Carnaval is organized by Roy du Cinema. Assorted Carnaval gear—noisemakers, plastic hats, confetti, masks, paper parasols—is sold from tables along the main drag of

Nice (avenue Médecin). However, the most important ingredient for Carnaval is foam string, which is sold in atomizer cans and which you spray until you have lost every care in the world. String battles with total strangers ensue at the drop of a plastic hat. String sells for about 2€ ($2.30) a can.

Nice Resources A–Z

Antiques

There is an entire district of antiques shops in Nice, as well as a regular (but very small) flea market and a wonderful *brocante* market on Monday mornings. Larger pieces of furniture are well priced here, so if you're shopping for shipping, you may hit pay dirt.

Big Names

Following are some of the big-name designer boutiques and multiples in Nice.

Cacharel
18 rue Paradis.

Chanel
6 rue Paradis.

Christian Dior
6 rue Paradis.

Emporio Armani
1 rue Paradis.

Escada
8 av. de Verdun.

Façonnable
7–9 rue Paradis; 10 rue Paradis.

Hermes
8 av. de Verdun.

KENZO
10 rue Paradis.

LACOSTE
6 av. Gustav V.

LANCEL
Centre Commercial Nice Etoile, av. Jean Médecin.

LOUIS VUITTON
6 rue Paradis.

SONIA RYKIEL
3 rue Paradis.

VENTILO
8 bis rue du Congrès.

ZARA
10 av. Jean Médecin.

DEPARTMENT STORES

Galeries Lafayette has a rather large store at place Masséna; the discount card you can get at your hotel entitles you to a 10% discount on all purchases. You must present the discount card before payment. This is not the *détaxe* refund, which at Galeries Lafayette comes to an additional 12%. **C&A,** the Dutch department store for low-cost clothes and things, has a branch at Nice Etoile.

FOODSTUFFS

Most of the stores listed in the "Finds" section (p. 306) offer olive oil and food. There is also a grocery store (a small one, but nice) in the basement of **Galeries Lafayette,** place Masséna.

FLORIAN
14 quai Papacino, Old Town.

This old-fashioned candy factory specializes in candied fruits but also makes jams. Great gifts. Sign up for the tour.

Lafayette Gourmet
Cap 3000, St-Laurent-du-Var.

This gourmet supermarket is located in a nearby Nice mall.

Home Style

Cedre Rouge
6 av. de Verdun.

Although Cèdre Rouge is a chain store, it's got high style, nice bistro-style silverware, and good pottery.

Habitat
Centre Commercial Nice Etoile, av. Jean Médecin.

Habitat, the U.K. chain, is slightly more upmarket than Ikea. This branch is a possible source for tabletop items and gifts.

Les Olivades
8 av. de Verdun.

Les Olivades is home to classy Provençal-style printed fabrics, some made into tabletop or home linens. It's located next door to Hermès.

Voyage Interieur
115 rue des Ponchettes, Old Town.

This gallery-like space features chic elements from around the world, with a North African twist—lots of natural woods.

Zita Vito Jardin
Galerie de la Victoire, 58 av. Jean Médecin.

Here's more North African chic, this time with Zen-inspired lines in earth tones and beige-y browns. The gallery is at the upper end of this main shopping drag, with an interior courtyard filled with merchandise and swagged with crystal chandeliers.

Maternity Wear

Formes
8 rue Alphonse Karr.

Formes is a French multiple selling chic maternity wear.

Multiples & Chain Stores

Apostrophe
8 av. de Verdun.

Here you'll find clean lines and very chic clothing—it's really a bridge line and not like a multiple at all.

Cotelac
3 rue Alphonse Karr.

Head here for a younger look—a little more slashed and distressed, but very trendy.

Du Pareil au Meme
44 rue Pastorelli.

Du Pareil au Même sells adorable kids' clothes.

Pimkie
Centre Commercial Nice Etoile, av. Jean Médecin.

This store carries hot teen cheapie looks.

Secrets Dessous
4 rue Masséna.

Secrets Dessous has lingerie in all price brackets.

Sephora
8 av. Jean Médecin.

You can shop for makeup forever.

Real-People Shopping

FNAC
Centre Commercial Nice Etoile, av. Jean Médecin.

FNAC is right near the train station, on the main shopping street in the big mall in the center of downtown. It's a super source for books, CDs, computer needs, and so on. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 7pm.

Parashop
5 rue Masséna.

This is a branch of the new modern chain of *parapharmacies*. It carries most brands in a clean, well-lit, open space that's easy to use. Fidelity cards (for frequent shoppers) are available.

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